COME-AND FIND-ME

ELIZABETH-ROBINS

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Come and Find Me

Hildegarde

Come and Find Me

By

Elizabeth Robins

Author of "The Magnetic North," "The Convert," etc.

With Illustrations by
E. L. Blumenschein

"I . . . had ambition not only to go farther than any one had been before; but as far as it was possible for man to go. . . ."

CAPTAIN COOK.

"Det er et svært vejarbejde — oppe i det nordlige. Med fjeldovergange — og med de utroligste vanskeligheder at overinde! Å du store, vakkre verden, — hvad det er for en lykke, det, at være vejbygger!"

LILLE EYOLF.

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TO FLORENCE BELL

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CHINSEGUT, HERNANDO COUNTY, FLORIDA
Jan. 20, 1906

MY DEAR F. B.:

I believe it to be commonly the practice of authors to write the dedication last. But I, being summoned by the laconic imperative of the Atlantic cable to exchange London for Florida, and being thereby arrested midway in what I have always thought of as your book, must needs recover some of the old impulse that you gave me to begin it, before I can go on.

I invoke you as I would a breath of your invigorating Yorkshire, for I am captive in a land of idleness—myself idlest of all the easy, time-squandering folk that are making believe to finish my house here upon the sunburnt hilltop.

This lodge in the wilderness, uplifted like an island above encompassing seas of green; this windswept, sun-steeped place, ought, perhaps (in spite of latitude and longitude), to give me back without your aid the picture and the feeling of the North. For the first word I set at the top of my page, though Indian, would not have been understanded of my ancient neighbors here. Not the Seminoles, the Alaskans gave us our name. I and another for whom it means home, pronounced it first to the rhythm of breakers beating on that wild Bering coast—in the midst of the pandemonium of the "farthest North" gold boom, we dreamed and planned the picture I look out upon this morning. It might not seem beautiful to you, yet, in spite of your wise warning, there have gone into my effort to make the dream come true the most precious

things I had. Into this Chinsegut, as you know, went, amongst the rest, a great faith.

So that, however reminiscent of people or conditions long since passed away, however much of the spirit of the past is garnered here as living influence, or as debris and as ashes, these were for me infinitesimal affairs by comparison with the hope for the Future that made me turn deaf ears to your admonishing. For this was to be a place where my fellow-dreamer and I should not only rest, but having rested, work as never before. Our best and biggest room was to be called the Workroom.

But some strange spell has hitherto hung over that apartment and all the house, since even the white remodelers of the slave-built dwelling have found it easier to play than work here.

As if foreseeing that the added wing, new stable, and the rest, would take more months a-building than they would need weeks in other climes, our "workmen," uneasy perhaps under the misnomer, organized themselves into a Musical Society. They would lay a brick or rap in a nail, and then, casting aside trowel or hammer, would catch up fiddle and bow, horn, or clarinet, trying (since walls had been known to fall at trumpet blast) whether these could be induced to rise to strains of "Dixie." One of the band to whom I owe my not very sound roof, was at least a person of imagination, as I will make your ladyship admit, if the distractions here will give me leave to try. These are not solely the growling of saws, the scraping of planes and of fiddles. I find myself forever running to and fro like a child in some enchanted playground, wooed by fifty things at once—but not one of them has aught to do with books or with any aspect of the art of letters.

My distractions have to do with such toys as the joy of re-discovering old friends in all three kingdoms, from the forgotten beauty of palms standing sentinel-like in sand as white as meal, to the blue heron that goes sailing by to the lake at our feet. Or I am called early to see the delicate print of a

deer's foot that passed our very gate; or I must watch the sun caught at setting in the great ilex, and see the light spilling into the Spanish moss, soaking into the long draperies, till they seem to hold refulgence in solution. Or I must go and plan the hedge of roses round an old burying-ground on the place, or listen half a morning to a mocking-bird, or steal down in the dusk to my beloved copse and play eavesdropper to the sullen owl who pretends he does n't haunt the magnolia above the spring. Or I must leave my coveted place of shade on the north veranda and come to watch our friend, Mr. Tarrypin, creeping heavily by in the hot sun on his way (I grieve to tell you) to the soup tureen. ("Lawd, yes. Tarrypin? He jes de same es chick'n, Miss 'Lizbess—once he in de pot!")

Even my interviews with the cook, elsewhere so summarily despatched, are here a thief of time. For our Peter, who learned his craft of the Cubans during the late war, is the most beguiling of conversationalists. In beautiful sky-blue, brass-buttoned clothes showing under a spotless apron, he stands, interlarding his promise to "do it Spanish style," with legends learned of his mother who was born in the negro quarters here in those more sumptuous days when our hill was crowned with the finest orange grove in all Hernando. Peter will tell you, chuckling, that our great twelve by twelve-inch cypress beams that turn the edge of the white carpenters' tools, were hand-hewn by his grandfather, and by that gallant woodman "tied and pinned" to frame the house before the "orange" days—when all cleared land was cotton field.

But more than by any other creature the spirit of idleness has been fostered by my four-footed friend, the particular joy of my life here, Dixie. For I must tell you that one's love of woods is only whetted by looking out, as I am told we do, upon two hundred and fifty thousand acres of virgin forest—the old Seminole hunting-grounds—which swallow up the white man's puny clearings so effectually that even a Zeiss glass can scarcely pick them out. Dixie and I may travel for hours, through tangles of jessamine-laced live-oak and palmetto, down to dim lakes where the cypresses stand in water to their

"knees" (with all the moss curtains close-drawn against the sun), and never see a soul. Then, when even in the open ways of the pine woods we find the warm day quenched in mist, I let the rein fall slack and trust to that skill of Dixie's, never baffled yet, to take me home the shortest way, in spite of night or storm or the fierce dazzle of tropic lightning.

If we are late, we know "Uncle" Fielding will be looking out for us. Even if I fail to distinguish his kind, dark face, I see the whites of his eyes shining, I hear his rich voice lowered to reproach that I should be abroad so late in the vast Annuttalagga woods that go to the verge of the world.

But Uncle Fielding has his share in my idleness, for he knows the stories I like best of all. When I 've gone to sit within the radiance of the great open fireplace (less for warmth than for sake of cedar scent and love of the flaring, singing resin in the pine), Uncle Fielding will come staggering in under the weight of a single log, and having thrown it down, will tarry awhile. To my polite hope that he feels at home in his new cottage, he replies with gentle assurance: "I 'll haf to be mighty ole and mighty painful befoh I leave this hilltop." With humility I learn to see myself as the transient one, the visitor, and Uncle Fielding as the one who rightly is "at home." Even for neighborly credit and fair regard I look to him. For when one of the younger generation, or some mere new-comer ventures: "They say, in the old days, you knew her brother," *"Knew* him?" says Uncle Fielding loftily, *"I raised him—"* and so re-establishes our respectability in a land that for so many years has known us only as little-remembered names.

Can you not see that with the vivid intervention of all this new-old life—the story you bade me write has in a brief space gone to a distance so illimitable that beside such a standard of remoteness, Florida is neighbor to the Pole? I tell you plainly that if this book of yours is ever to be finished, you must send me something of that influence that has so often spurred me on before. Once even here, a touch of it, like your hand on my shoulder, reached me one evening, in spite

of all the hosts of Hernando. Walking about at sunset to count how many mangoes were growing near the house—I was pursued as far as the great ilex at the gates by faint intermittent strains of some unearthly music. I looked up, thinking of those "harps" that Hilda heard and to whose strains she unsealed the Master Builder's ears. Again that music! faint but unmistakable; sad and wild, with its vaguely inciting call. A little shamefaced for my fancy, I said to one who knew not Hilda: "I could almost swear I heard harps in the air." "Yes," was the answer, "on the roof," as though it were the most natural thing on earth that a carpenter, instead of making us rain-proof, should devise and lash in place a wind-harp over our heads! I thought how you would have disapproved that man—and cherished him.

Although the winds that come sweeping over the Mexican Gulf have cast the great lyre down from my housetop—nevertheless, now that I 've invoked you, I seem to hear the air again—even feel on my shoulder that touch of your hand with which you sent me forth to try if, in the midst of the London din, we might not make folk pause an instant, and say with upturned faces: "Harps in the air!" You and I have heard them for many a year, my friend. I think I never was with you long, but I caught some note of that far music. Even with the thick of the world between us, I listen for you to call the tune that "sends me on."

E. R.

COME AND FIND ME

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CHAPTER I

A CRISIS in the financial world of California kept the men who were employed in the Palmas Valley Bank of Valdivia hard at work for several hours after statutory closing time.

Nathaniel Mar never came home in these days without bringing a black leather bag full of papers, to work over in the dining-room.

He had his big desk in there because Mrs. Mar thought it out of place in the parlor, though the parlor was the quietest room in the house and the least used, whereas the dining-room was the most frequented quarter of the modest establishment, and the very place where both the big desk, and the big man who sat before it, were most in the way.

For here the family not only ate their meals, but here, in Mrs. Mar's rocking-chair, the screams of the infant daughter were drowned in milk or overcome by sleep; here the two small boys were taught letters and manners; here, on their mother's work-table, was reared the ever-

renewed mountain of "mending," and these the walls that oftener than any others looked down upon the mistress's struggles with the "single-handed help"—a succession of Irish or Scandinavian girls who came, saw, conquered some of the china, and departed.

This concentration of family life in the dining-room was not peculiar to the Mars. Valdivia—all California, indeed all the towns of all the northern and western states, were full of houses where the shut-up parlors bore dumb witness to a social habit that was become mere tradition.

The forebears of these people, especially those German, French, or Spanish, had need of a room where they might receive their friends and talk to them at their ease. But in their descendants this much chastened need had taken on the air of an indulgence, and was shrinking out of sight.

It is true that even the less well-to-do, summoning all their strength, sometimes gave "parties," but few houses encouraged the cheerful custom of having friends "drop in." And so, no more useless room in any dwelling than the parlor. Yet so great was the power of this tradition of a lost hospitality, that people who had almost nothing else over and above the grimmest necessities, still had their parlor. Discomfort and cramping of every kind was stoically borne that the sacred precincts might be preserved inviolate. For what? Nobody ever asked.

So then, in the dining-room, sat Nathaniel Mar even on this fine Sunday afternoon, when, as a rule, the desk was shut and the owner gone to potter in the garden. But the exigency was great, and for once even the Seventh Day had brought no rest. As he sat there, bent over the desk,

the light fell with such harshness on the man's foreshortened features, under the unkempt mop of prematurely graying hair, that you would not easily have believed him to be under forty odd.

He was not yet thirty-five. The deep line that dropped from the side of each nostril, to lose itself in the heavy, dark mustache, gave to his face a stricken and weariful air. And he sat crooked, with one high shoulder more hunched than the other. You saw the reason of that when he got up to shut out the sounds of pan-banging, and fire-irons rattling, that came in through the inch of open door opposite the one leading into the hall. Before rising, Mar had felt for his walking-stick, and any one who noticed how heavily he bore upon it in limping over the worn carpet, knew why it was that one of his great shoulders was pushed awry.

He made the same detour in returning to his seat as had carried him to the kitchen door, carefully cruising round the pitfall presented by a half-yard or so of extra dilapidation in the yellow-brown carpet. As you looked closer at what his avoidance made more noticeable, you saw that a less faded piece had been tacked over a part hopelessly worn and mended, and how even this newer square had despairingly let go of the tacks that held it, and been kicked up by some foot less considerate or more courageous than Mr. Mar's. The superimposed piece sat now, in a frayed, rag-baggy condition, gaping with despair, and like some beggar in extremis by the way, ready to lay hold on the first unwary foot that passed.

The entire room wore that indescribable air of settled melancholy that no one thing in it, not even the carpet, seemed quite ugly or uncomfortable enough to account

for. The furniture was heavy and old. Upon the walls, besides two or three reconnaissance maps, were some inoffensive prints. A "Signing of the Declaration of Independence" hung high between the two windows, and underneath, in oval, gilt frames, were companion pictures of Mar's mother and of his father, who had been for many years minister to Valdivia's first Presbyterian Church.

On the opposite wall a good engraving of Lincoln was flanked, somewhat incongruously, by a photograph of a buxom young woman with a group of girls behind her—Mar's wife in her school-teaching days, with her class. Besides these, an old view of the Lake of Geneva, a print of Cromwell, and on the wall behind Mar's revolving chair, an engraved portrait, bearing underneath it the inscription: John W. Galbraith, President Rock Hill Mining Co.

Even if these adornments were of a very mild description, they, at least, covered several feet of the marbled yellow paper that apparently had been chosen (and chosen a good while ago) to "go with" the hideous "grained" woodwork. That it did "go with" that peculiarly perverse soiling and smearing of inoffensive surfaces, may not be denied. It went far. It arrived at such a degree of success that all the little room irradiated a bilious yellowness "clawed" with muddy brown.

The very atmosphere was not left as nature sent it in at the window. It halted upon the sill and changed color, like one who gets wind of ill news. The moment it penetrated beyond the holland blinds it turned sick and overflowed the room in dirty saffron.

It may well be wondered why any creature who was

not obliged to should come here. And yet the defeated-looking man at the window did not lack high companionship. Sunset and the rain, the call of the winds, clouds of majesty, and mists of silver, not these alone. Day-dreams penetrated the sullen walls. Here, where the rudest emigrant would not long abide, fair visions made themselves at home—"exultations, agonies"—a field here for the unconquerable mind no more unfit than many another for the long battle men call life.

On this particular July afternoon, Nathaniel Mar had no sooner shut out one order of disturbance, than another penetrated the room from a different direction.

"Sigma!" a loud, clear voice was calling from the region of the stairs. "Sigma," and again, "Sigma! Have you set the table? Sigma-a-a!"

Nathaniel Mar wrote on.

The door opened suddenly and in came a brisk, rather handsome, dark-eyed woman, with an infant on her arm. Singularly enough the child seemed to be as little interrupted in its occupation of sleeping as the father in his writing. There were certain sounds that both were inured to. Among others, Mrs. Mar calling "Sigma," or "Kate," or "Jane." But when she stopped short near the threshold and asked:

"Where is that girl?" Mar, without raising his eyes from his paper, made a little motion toward the door he had just shut.

"I should think," he said, quietly, "she was probably breaking up the kitchen stove."

Before he finished, Mrs. Mar had opened the other door, and again called "Sigma!"

"Yes—yes." In rushed a little white-headed Swede,

fourteen to fifteen years of age, her sleeves tucked up, her coarse gown tucked up, her fair skin showing vividly a sooty mark across her forehead, which she had smudged down her nose and finely shaded off into the red of her cheek.

When Sigma was calm and collected she walked the floor as if it were knee-deep in sand. When she was agitated she did not walk at all. She plunged. Sigma was agitated now.

"Coom!" she said, lifting a bare elbow toward the kitchen as another person might point with a finger. "Coom!" and turning heavily she was about to plunge back into her special domain.

But Mrs. Mar arrested her. "Why have n't you set the table? Look at the time." She pointed.

Sigma paused and thought. Following the index finger she recognized the clock, looked inquiringly from it to the lady, and then suddenly felt she understood, a thing of almost exciting infrequency. She scuffled good-naturedly across the room, picked up the heavy time-piece and was in the act of handing it to Mrs. Mar.

"Let the clock alone! Put it down, I say. What will she do next? The table. Table!" She beat upon it briskly with her one free hand. *"Supper."*

"Oh, soopra!" says the girl, setting down the clock and lurching hurriedly toward the kitchen.

"Stop! Don't you understand you have to set the table earlier to-day? Before—you—go—out. Your evening. Understand? Your friend calls for you at six." She indicated the hour on the clock face. "Takes you—heaven knows where. *She* does n't forget if you do. *Your—evening—out."* As Sigma only stood and stared

dully, Mrs. Mar dropped into the rocking-chair with, "I foresee this girl will drive me demented."

Sigma embraced the opportunity to shuffle toward the door again.

"Where you off to now? You can't go till you 've set the table. Here!" Still with the well-inured infant sleeping on her arm, Mrs. Mar, remarking in a conversational tone that she was "certain she should go mad," pulled open the sideboard drawer and took out the tablecloth. "Put this on. *Straight,* for a change. Then the mats."

The mistress's eye falling suddenly upon that deplorable place in the carpet, she was forcibly reminded of the little copper-toed boots that had wrought the havoc.

"What are they at now?" she said, half to herself, as she crossed the room, and, craning her chin over the sleeping child at her breast, she guided the toe of her shoe under the tacked bit, stroking down the darned tatters underneath, before she straightened and trod flat the outer layer. Each time thereafter that she crossed the troubled area her foot, half-impatient, half-caressing, encouraged the patch to lie still. "What keeps those children so quiet? Where are they?"

Sigma, hearing the anxious rise in her mistress's voice, dropped the corner of the cloth she was twitching and rushed for the mats.

"No, no, finish. Here. Straight. Like this." A moment's silence, and then again, "Where are those children?"

Sigma hurriedly offered her the cruet.

"Idiot. I am asking you about the children. The—chil—dren. Where—are—they? Don't you know? Lit-

tle boys. Trenn, and Harry, and Jack Galbraith—where gone?''

''Oh, Yack! He—'' Sigma, with great action of hip and elbow, splurged over to the window, and motioned away across an empty lot.

''What, *again?* Here,'' Mrs. Mar wheeled upon her husband, ''you must hold the baby a moment. If I lay her down she 'll wake up and scream.''

As Mrs. Mar hastened out through the kitchen you could hear that she paused an instant to exclaim aghast at something she found there.

Mr. Mar had accepted the charge with a curious tranquillity, making the infant comfortable in the hollow of his left arm. Then he went on with his writing.

Sigma returned to the intricate task of setting the table. She did it all with an excited gravity, as if she were engaged in some spirited game, putting down plates, knives, and forks with an air of one playing trumps, and yet not quite sure if it was the right moment for them. When she had placed the straw mats with mathematical precision, she drew off proudly, to get the full splendor of effect. When it came to dealing with the sugar bowl, she glanced at Mar's bent head, and helped herself to a lump, became furiously industrious upon the strength of that solatium, and plunged after spoons and cups. Whenever she made a clatter she stopped sucking and glanced nervously toward Mar, as if she expected him to rise and overwhelm her.

He, with unlifted head, wrote steadily on.

The child slept.

Sigma put a worn horsehair chair at head and foot of the table, two high chairs on one side for the little

boys, and an ordinary one on the other; as she did this last her eye fell on the four cups. She paused uncertain, till she had noiselessly counted five on her stumpy fingers. Then, "Oh, Yack maa ha' en!" she reminded herself, lurched away into the kitchen and reappeared wiping a cup on a dish towel, one end of which she had tucked in her apron string. As she was about to deposit the fifth cup, she glanced at the man bent over the desk, and put her disengaged hand again in the sugar bowl. Mar turned suddenly in his creaking chair; Sigma started, and meaning to drop the sugar, dropped the cup instead. She stared an instant, open-mouthed, as at some unaccountable miracle; and then, with a howl, flung up her bare arms and fled round the table on her way to the kitchen, caught her great foot in the carpet-trap and measured her length on the floor.

"Look here, you must go into the kitchen to do that." Mar spoke as one not presuming to deny that it might be a part of her duty to precipitate herself on her stomach and howl, but questioning only the propriety of the spot selected. "I can't have you doing it here," he said.

Sigma was still "doing it," so far as howling went, but she was also scrambling up, with her elbow held over her head, as if she counted on a thumping. From under her bare forearm her streaming eyes looked out at Mar. Whether the man's quiet face in the midst of the uproar astonished, calmed her—she gaped, letting the rude lamentation die in her throat.

"Men—*Meesis Marr—rr!*" she said under her breath, picking up the cup.

Mrs. Mar's husband held out his hand for it. "It 's only the handle," he said, and set the cup down on the

writing-table, that he might change the position of the fretting child. For his long-suffering daughter was at last roused to protest.

The little maid-servant wiped her eyes, and, with the air of one who is willing to let bygones be bygones, shuffled a step nearer to the desk.

"Me—Gif Sigma," she said, and held out her red arms.

Mar looked up, understood, and handed over the baby. It was curious to see the practised sureness with which this female barbarian—who caught her big feet in the carpet and dropped the china—with what skill she handled that fragile and intricate mechanism, an infant. Mar watched her as she stood there, swaying her own thick body back and forth like a human rocking-chair, holding the child in sure comfort, patting it softly, and crooning to it uncouth words in a foreign tongue. Miss Mar understood perfectly, and responded by laying her small pink face against the scullion's untidy gown and falling back into slumber.

The opening of the front door, and voices in the hall—above all one voice ordaining that certain persons should go up-stairs and *wait for her!*—made Sigma pause, listen, and then, still holding close the pacified infant, she beat a stealthy retreat, shutting the kitchen door behind her with a softness incredible.

Mrs. Mar, upon her reappearance, was seen to be ushering in by the shoulder an anxious little boy of eight or nine. As with some force she conveyed him across the room, his foot caught in the same place where Sigma had met defeat. But Sigma had not been sustained by Mrs. Mar's hand. The lady merely unhooked the boy with an

extra shake. Then, with her free hand, she pulled his chair out from the table, and thrust him into it.

"Now, you 're to sit right there, and then I 'll know that at least till supper-time you won't be getting my children into any more mischief."

Mar had looked up upon their entrance, seemed about to speak, and then dropped a discreet head over his work.

"Where 's the baby?" demanded his wife.

"Sigma—"

"This precious protégé of yours," interrupted the lady, again straightening the carpet with the toe of her shoe; "this precious protégé of yours has pulled up a plank out of the sidewalk, dragged it across the field down to the duck-pond, and there I found him, using it as a raft."

"*I* had n't used it—not yet." A world of lost opportunity was heavily recalled.

"Oh, no, *you* were n't using it."

But the irony was lost.

"Vere was n't woom for all of us, so I let Twenn and Hawwy go ve first voyage. I 'm vewwy kind to little boys."

"Oh, indeed! So kind you preferred to risk other children's lives while you looked on."

"Looked on? Oh, no, ma'am, did n't you see I was workin' like anyfing?" He glanced across at his ally. "It was a steamship, Mr. Mar. I was ve injine. I 'm a most glowious injine—"

"Yes, if you please," Mrs. Mar broke in. "He 's been propelling the plank all round the pond with those two poor little innocents on it—the greatest wonder they were n't drowned."

"It was very wrong," said Mr. Mar, gravely—then, under his breath to his wife, "but the water is n't much over a foot at the deepest."

"Quite enough to drown any wretched baby that might fall in— but, of course, you defend that boy no matter what he—"

"Not at all—not at all. I don't approve in the least of his—"

"And our two little boys mud and dirt from their heads to their heels, looking like a couple of chimney-sweeps—"

"No, ma'am," said the young gentleman from the horsehair chair, in a conciliatory tone. "Twenn and Hawwy ain't black, only just bwown."

"Brown, indeed! I 'll brown *you,* sir, if you ever do such a thing again while you 're staying *here!* Harry with his stocking quite torn off one leg! And Trennor's only decent breeches—"

"Vere was a nail in vat board," Jack explained, conversationally, putting a finger through a jag in his own trouser knee.

"Small matter to *you,* if you do ruin your things." (Jack began to swing his muddy feet—it was gloriously true.) "But you 've got to remember that other children's clothes don't grow on gooseberry bushes."

"My pants did n't neever," returned Jack, sturdily.

"Keep your feet still and your tongue, too."

"Yes 'm."

Mrs. Mar was in the act of turning away, after a further slight attention to the carpet patch, when her eye fell upon the handleless cup on the desk.

"Did you do that?" she demanded.

Mar cleared his throat, and Mrs. Mar for once, not waiting to hear the horrid details, sat down in her rocking-chair, despair in her face and the broken cup in her hand.

"I never saw anything like it. The grate in the kitchen range has just collapsed, too."

"Really? That 's bad—"

"It 's worse than bad—it 's awful."

"We must let the stove people know—"

"How are you going to do that on Sunday?"

"Oh—ah—well, it matters less I suppose on Sunday than if it happened on a week-day."

"It won't matter in the least, of course, to have no hot water to wash the clothes in, Monday morning. Perhaps *you 'll* think it matters more when it comes to eating cold things for I don't know how long."

"I think you 'll find I shall be able to put up with—"

"Yes, it 's perfectly true, I always find you readier to put up with disaster than to struggle against it."

"How would you propose I should struggle against a broken stove?"

She turned her flushed face from him.

"Did n't I tell you not to kick the table?" she demanded of Jack.

"Oh! Yes 'm. I forgot." He curled up the disgraced foot underneath him, for a reminder that it was to keep still.

"The furniture," Mrs. Mar went on, looking round the room, "is quite dilapidated enough without *your* making it worse."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, I suppose I must go and attend to those chil-

dren, and the supper. But don't let him kick the furniture, Nathaniel, even if he is the son of your adored Galbraith. The owner of all that Rock Hill Mining property did n't trouble himself much about *you.*''

''Yes, he did. He was a very good friend,'' and Mar made a slight movement as of one clearing a space in the air before setting to work again.

His wife, in her progress to the door, halted mechanically in the middle of the patch, as though the momentary weight of her presence there would leave behind a subjugating effect. But she murmured absently: ''I must have another hunt for—'' Then, turning with sudden animation: ''Is it you who 've taken away my tack-hammer?'' she demanded of Jack.

''No, ma'am.''

''Well, understand,'' she went on, precisely as though he had admitted his responsibility for the disappearance of the tool, ''understand you 're to sit there till supper, and this is the last of your playing about that dirty duck-pond.''

''I forgot it was Sunday,'' he said, penitent.

''Sunday or any other day—never again.''

Jack gasped with incredulity, and then, slowly, ''You don't weally mean we 're never to go to ve pond for ever and ever!''

''Well, just you try it! And you 'll find yourself going back to school to spend your holidays with the janitor.''

In the pause that followed this awful threat Jack murmured: ''Never go a-sploring any more!'' and then sat as one paralyzed by an awful and unexpected blow.

Mrs. Mar replaced the handleless cup upon the table, and took up the corner of the cloth to determine the extent of a damage wrought in the last washing.

"Everything we possess seems to be giving out at once —like the different parts of the One Hoss Shay. It 's exactly"—she turned her bright, dark eyes toward the writing-table, and spoke with a sudden access of vigor— "exactly as if there was a law that allowed you for months and years to patch and tinker, to bolster up your rickety furniture, to darn your old carpets, to reseat your old chairs, to make over the clothes, to solder the saucepans, and keep things going generally, up to a given moment. But when that moment comes"—she lifted her finger Sibyl-like in the air—"every blessed belonging begins to crack, or fray, or creak with the pangs of approaching dissolution. Are you listening to what I say, Nathaniel? There is n't a thing in this house that does n't need to be renewed." She spoke with a directness that seemed pointedly to include her husband among the dilapidations. He, half-absent, half-speculative, looked round upon objects familiar to him from childhood.

"Who 'd ever think," pursued his wife, "who 'd ever think that we 'd been married less than eight years? But this is what comes of not furnishing new when you first set up housekeeping. If you don't get nice things when you marry you never get them."

"Some people," said Mar, "seem to like old furniture."

"Let them have it, then!" Her quick gesture presented the entire contents of the house to the first bidder. "*I* say for young people to begin life with the battered belongings of their fathers and mothers is a mistake."

"Well, my dear," returned her husband, with some dignity, "it 's a mistake you had no share in. But," he added hastily, "we had no choice."

"No," she said bitterly, "we 've had very little choice."

"We did once," said Nathaniel Mar.

In the pause she looked down at the patch on the carpet.

"And we ignored it," he finished.

"Oh, if you are going back upon that old foolishness." She turned abruptly and set down the broken cup.

"You did n't think it so foolish when I first told you about it."

"Oh, did n't I!"

"No. It made just all the difference then."

"What difference, I 'd like to know, did it ever make?"

"It made you say 'Yes' after you 'd said 'No.' "

"The more fool I," she said, and left the room.

CHAPTER II

THE big man and the little man sat and looked at the patch on the carpet, till for one of them the ragged place disappeared.

A big tear splashed on the grimy little hand.

But out of the mist, a voice: "Can't you think of any safer sort of games?"

The balked navigator sniffed audibly, and with the back of his hand he made a dirty smear across his wet face. "We don't any of us seem to care much about vem, if vey are too safe."

"H'm," and with a faint smile Mar resumed his writing.

Jack Galbraith sat quite still, for him, with the disgraced foot tucked under him. But Mar, without raising his eyes, was conscious as a woman might have been, of the frequent journey of the small hand across the eyes, and now and then the more efficacious aid of a sleeve employed to clear the watery vision.

Presently, "After I 'most dwownded ve childwen, I expect she would n't let me wead my twavel book. What do you fink, Mr. Mar?"

The gentleman addressed laid down his pen, but still looking at it, "Well, I don't know," he said cautiously.

Whereupon Jack Galbraith gave way openly to tears.

"You 're not going to forget," said the man, with no great show of sympathy, "you 're not going to forget that however much a boy's father leaves him, America has n't got any use for an idle man."

"It 's Mrs. Mar makes me sit here doin' nuffin'," the child indignantly defended himself.

"Oh, for the moment, yes. But when the time comes to choose what you 're going to do, Jack—if I 'm not at hand to talk it over, think about civil engineering. It takes a man about, and on more intelligent terms than my profession—"

"Yes," Jack threw in upon the ground swell of a heavy sob. "I should n't like sittin' countin' money in a bank," and while he caught his breath he looked about drearily, as if already he saw himself an imprisoned cashier.

"Sitting in a bank is n't the profession I chose, either. I am—I was a surveyor," said Nathaniel Mar.

"Oh—h?" inquired the child, in his surprise forgetting to continue the celebration of his private misfortunes. "Did *you* use to go all over everywhere wiv a spy-glass and a chain?"

"Yes, the members of the Scientific Corps are expected to go 'all over everywhere.' "

"Clear wound ve world?"

"Well, *we* did n't go round—we went the other way, the way that takes you to the top."

"Did you get clear to ve vewwy top of ve world?"

"Nobody 's ever been clear to the top."

"Why has n't anybody?"

"Tough job!"

"Was it tough job to go where you went?"

"It was n't easy. Some of our work lay quite near enough to the arctic circle."

"But I expect you liked it a lot better van—" He paused, looked about, and felt gloom return upon him. If Mar was thinking so was Jack Galbraith. Again he dragged his rough sleeve across his hot, little face. "Ain't it perferly awful sittin' still?" he observed.

"Yes, it 's pretty awful," agreed Mr. Mar, glancing out of the window.

"Was it up vere you found ve parlor bearskin and Mrs. Mar's white fox?"

"Yes, it was up there."

"You 're sure if I 'm a engineer or a surveyor *I 'll* be able to go up vere where you found—"

"Certain to be able to go somewhere."

"Why can't I go where you did?" he asked, querulously. As Mr. Mar did not answer at once, "Is n't vere any little fing left to be done up vere?"

"Oh, lots! But you see I went there in '65—going on ten years ago, when people thought they 'd like to have a telegraph line between Asia and America. So some of us went to survey the Alaskan part of the route (only it was n't called Alaska then) and decide the best course for the line that was to meet the one coming across from Siberia." Again Nathaniel Mar studied the end of his pen.

"Yes," said Jack, blowing his nose with an air of faintly reviving faith in life's possibilities. "Yes, and vere you met ve bear, and Mrs. Mar's white—"

"We got some furs and truck, but we did n't get the telegraph line."

"Why did n't you?"

"Well, you see, only a few years ago people laughed at the idea of an Atlantic cable. But while we were hard at work up yonder surveying and clearing and setting up telegraph poles, did n't some other fellows prove the possibility of an Atlantic cable by just going and laying it! So we were recalled."

"But you had got pwetty far, anyhow."

"Yes, we got pretty far."

"You got to where ve foxes turn white and ve bears—"

"Yes," said Mar, reflectively, and then there was a pause.

Jack looked at him. "Could n't you tell me about when you got vat bear, or"—in the tone of one grateful for small favors—"or how you found Mrs. Mar's white—"

"I don't seem to remember anything specially interesting about the bears or the foxes." His far-off look gave the little boy a sudden feeling of being abandoned by his one friend. He stood it for a moment, and then suddenly twisted his lithe body round and buried his face in the crook of the arm that clutched the chair back. Mar raised his eyes and seemed to come home from some vast journey.

"Something curious did happen to a man I knew up there," he said, in that friendly tone Jack knew so well. "A fellow who was knocking round the Russian Redoubt at St. Michaels, with the rest of the Scientific Corps, waiting for the revenue cutter that was to take us back to San Francisco. We got pretty tired waiting—"

"Pwickers in your feet?" Jack interrupted, suddenly. Mar stopped short, for although Jack had uncovered his

face to listen he was engaged in making the most surprising grimaces. "I 've got awful pwickers myself," he said.

"Prickers?"

"Yes. Oh, oh, my foot 's full of champagne." Gingerly, and with further contortions of countenance, he stretched the cramped foot out.

"Champagne?" Mar had echoed. "What do you know about champagne?"

"Once—papa's birfday. Oh, oh, my foot 's full of it!"

"If it 's gone to sleep you 'd better stamp," recommended his friend gravely, and Jack applied the remedy with apparent relief after the first awful shock. He stood cautiously twisting about to restore circulation while Mar went on: "Yes, we got pretty tired hanging round St. Michaels, and one day two of the party took a boat and went off to an island to get birds' eggs. While they were out a storm came up. An awful storm," he assured his inattentive listener, but Jack was still gloomily twirling about, trying his numb foot, and not taking any stock apparently in a story that did n't boast a bear in it, or even a white—

"I never in my life saw anything like it," Mar went on. "The gale churned up the sediment of Norton Sound into a boiling, yellow froth. The sleet gave up trying to come down, and took to shooting horizontally, as straight as a charge of musketry, and wherever it hit bare flesh—" He shook his shaggy head at the memory.

"*I* would n't mind a little fing like vat!" said Jack, loftily.

"Well,"— Mar accepted the implied criticism with meekness,—"what they minded most was that they

could n't steer a course. It was going to be great luck if the boat lived at all in such a sea. She was driven north first. Neither one of the men knew just where it was they 'd got to, but any kind of land was a pretty good sight. They were almost as glad to get near it as they were to get away from it."

"Why did n't vey like it?" Jack did n't so much as pause in his twirling to inquire.

"Well, it was n't a very pretty place for landing purposes."

"Ho!" said the young gentleman with careless superiority, "I don't mind where *I* land! One time I landed wight on top of a earfquake!"

"Ah!" said Mar, gravely, "that was pretty daring; but you may depend it was n't in as bad a place as the one I 'm talking about. Horrible steep cliffs sheer down to the shore. Boulders piled helter-skelter. Could n't see much through the dimness of the sleet and the dazzle of the spray, still, they saw enough to know it was n't the harbor they were hoping for. But to get the boat out of that boiling surf alive—no, it was n't easy."

Mar caught the first look of keenness that crossed the tear-stained face—the sudden taut aspect of the slim little body, and he knew perfectly well that the modest young navigator before him was saying in his heart, "Ah, now, if *I 'd* been there." Thus encouraged, Mar went on: "Things had been bad enough out in the open sea, but here you were being driven straight on the rocks, and the wind—you don't know anything yet about what the wind can do when it tries."

"What kind of fing?"

"It cut the top off those great waves as clean as you

can slice the peak off a hillock of ice-cream; and the water was hurled at you, not in spray, but in masses, you know—masses that never broke till they struck the men or the boat—except when the wind veered, and then the water masses were flung clean up on the cliffs, as neatly as you could throw a bottle of soda on our roof here and never see a drop spilled till the glass burst on the slates."

Jack nodded and seemed to forget his twirling, though he stood with his body slightly askew, ready to begin again.

"They 'd never have got out of that boiling caldron alive if the wind had n't changed." Mar wagged his head in a final sort of way, and turned in his revolving chair to pick up a fallen paper.

"Is vat all? And vey did get home—"

"No, that 's not all, and they did n't get home. Only one of them got anywhere." Mar bent his big body slightly forward and clasped his hands round the good knee. The other leg was stretched straight out in front of him, stiff and lifeless looking.

"They kept afloat for several hours," he went on, "only to be wrecked after all, a mile or two beyond an ugly looking cape called Nome."

"Wecked! Were vey weally wecked?"

Mar nodded. In an emergency so great Jack did not scruple to turn his back on the stool of penitence. He came and planted himself on wide apart legs, directly in front of Mr. Mar, and stood there waiting. But Mr. Mar seemed to be thinking less about Jack now, and he stared steadily at the hole in the carpet.

"What happened to ve little boat?"

"The little boat was rapidly converted into little flinders."

"Ven how could ve men get away again?"

"That 's what one of the men would have liked somebody to tell him."

"Were n't vere any people vere on vat land?"

"Not a soul."

"Where was ve ovver man?"

"He had been washed out of the boat—he—it was hard to say where the other man was."

"Did n't his fwiend look for him?"

"Not just then. The first thing the friend did was to tear up his shirt."

"Gwacious! Was he as mad as vat?"

"No, he was n't mad, but he wanted some strips to tie round a wound he 'd got."

"Oh! And when he 'd done vat?"

"Then he went up on the tundra."

"What 's ve—"

"The tundra is the great, rolling plain. They call it 'the steppes' in Siberia. A few inches below the arctic moss that covers it, it 's frozen, even in summer, as hard as iron. And it never melts. It 's been frozen like that for millions of years."

"Why did ve man want to go up on ve—ve—?"

"Well, he seemed to think he 'd like to go to sleep. So that 's what he did. He slept a long time. When he woke up he went down to the beach, and the first thing he saw was his friend. It looked as if the friend had been sleepy, too. He was taking his ease down there on the sand, in a tangle of seaweed. His face was hidden. The other one went down to him, as fast as his wound would

let him, and he called several times. Then he took hold of his friend's shoulder and shook him. But the friend never stirred—he was dead. Up there, above the line of seaweed and driftwood, either he or the surf had flung his rifle—the butt rather battered, but nothing a handy man could n't put right; only a rifle is n't much good without cartridges. By and by, the live man dug a grave for the dead one up above tide line in the sand; and when he had buried the body, he sat down and wondered how long it would be before the end would come for himself. While he sat there tinkering at the rifle, a couple of natives came down the coast."

"Cannibals?" In his excitement Jack dropped on the floor like a small Turk, with his legs curled under him. But he had steadied his precipitate fall into that position with a hand on his friend's leg—and, as ill-luck would have it, not the good leg, but the stiff, forbidding member that poor Mar dragged about the world with the help of his stout walking-stick. Now, to touch that leg would have been like touching the leg of a table, if somehow it had n't been more like touching a corpse. Jack's friend did n't seem to mind. But the boy felt the contact the more keenly for the fact that Mar felt it hardly at all. That was the horror of a wooden leg—that it could n't feel. Jack snatched away his hand as if it had been burned. But Mar was saying calmly, "Cannibals? Oh, no. Esquimaux, quite good fellows. They must have seen white men and firearms before, for they took a deep interest in the rifle. The castaway made them understand he was hungry. They nodded and pointed back the way they had come. The white man got up and hobbled away with them."

"What made him hobble?"

"Oh—a—it 's quite common after a wreck—you 'll notice people often hobble for a while. Well, they went along the beach, till they came to a place so rocky it drove them up on the edge of the tundra; and up there the white man saw across the plain to the nor'ard, a low line of hills streaked with snow. And there was one bare peak in particular that stood out very plain. It looked only about eight or nine miles away, and you could see quite well there was something curious about it. Yes, it was queer."

"What was ve matter wiv it?"

"It had a curious-shaped top. Even from the coast it did n't look natural. You 'd swear it was a monument of some kind. The natives did n't seem to know anything about it. There was a river flowing down from the hills through the tundra to the sea, and all the mouth of it was choked with driftwood, though there was n't a tree in sight and had n't been all along. Beyond the driftwood, a long sand-spit ran out into the sea, and spread itself right and left, parallel to the coast, and on this sand-spit were a lot of little driftwood huts, skin boats drawn up, and people in fur standing round a fire. The two Esquimaux took the white man across in a boat, and told the other Esquimaux about him. And they gave him some food, fish. Everybody took so much interest in his rifle that he had to sit on it. They talked a good deal, but the white man did n't know what it was all about. So he ate and slept, and ate and slept, always with his rifle under his arm. When he got tired of eating and sleeping, the castaway sat and looked at the sea. Never a sail. And sometimes he would turn and look at that queer

peak over beyond the tundra. He gathered that these people did n't live here on this sand-spit—they were only camping. Kind of Esquimaux summer resort. No, they could n't take him to a white settlement. They knew nothing about any white settlement. Then he would show them, he said. Let them bring down their best boat, and he would give his gun to them if they 'd take him off there to the southeast, to St. Michaels. They shook their heads and bustled away. The white man saw with horror signs of a beginning to break camp. Where were they all going? Over the hills? No, on up the coast by sea. When?'' Mar pantomimed their answer—placed his two hands palm to palm, laid his head down on them sideways and shut his eyes, opened them briskly, and took hold of his stick as if about to start on a journey.

Jack was grinning with delight. ''Was *vat* ve way vey said 'to-morrow morning?' ''

''Just like that. They were going off the very next day!''

''Not goin' to leave vat poor man all alone vere, were vey?''

''No, they seemed quite ready to take the castaway and his rifle along. But''—Mr. Mar looked so grave that Jack came closer still—''to go up yonder with them to their underground winter home seemed to the castaway almost as horrible as to be left behind. Well, he had a day anyhow to think it over. His wound was still pretty painful, but he felt whatever happened, he ought to go over the tundra to that queer hill and take a look at the situation from the top. He must have been feverish, or he 'd have realized that he was n't fit yet for hard exercise, and that there was n't a ghost of a likelihood of a

settlement on the far side, since these natives knew nothing about it. Then you see, there was the awful danger that on this last day a rescue party should sail hopelessly by while he was away, or a whaling schooner pass, that he might have hailed. But no. He had got it into his head that if he could only reach the top of that glacier-carved height, all his troubles would be at an end. But he did have the sense to guard against the natives making off in his absence. He got one of the boys to come along with him.

"How old was vat boy?"

"Oh—a—about your size, but four or five years older, and very clever at throwing the bird-dart. No, I 'll tell you about that another time. They set off across the tundra. It was n't easy walking. It was n't walking at all. It was jumping from one moss knoll to another, or wading to the knees in the spongy hollows. But he 'd look up at the peak and say: 'Once I 'm *there*—' All the same, he had to call a halt several times. He 'd find a dryish place, and he 'd sit down and stare about him. They had long lost sight of the sand-spit. Even the sea had disappeared. To right and left, as far as you could see, tundra, tundra, nothing but tundra, a few pools shining in the hollows, and acres of sedge and moss, and low-growing 'scrub-willow.' Nothing else. Just this featureless plain till the land met the ocean and the ocean met the arctic ice. Suddenly, 'What 's that?' says the white man, and he pointed sou'west. The native stared. The light plays you queer tricks on the tundra. You often see lakes and ships and cities that are n't there. But this did n't look like a mirage, it was too simple, too distinct. Just two sticks stuck in the tundra. They might be one

mile away, they might be ten. But there those sticks stood as clear against the blue sky as a couple of bean poles on a prairie farm.''

''Vey *were n't* bean poles!'' said the prescient listener.

''No,'' agreed Mar. ''The white man decided it must be some driftwood contrivance of the natives. Only the remarkable thing about it was, that he had n't noticed it before. For a thing like that is apt to strike you in a country where there was n't a tree for a hundred and fifty miles to the south'ard, and not one between you and the Pole. Well, he felt he 'd know more about those sticks, and he 'd know more about a lot besides, when he 'd got to the top of the hill. So they went on; but the hill was a good way off. The 'little white patches' turned out to be vast fields of rotten snow. You went in up to your waist. The native jabbered, and seemed to be pointing out that it was better to go the long way round. There was less snow, and there did n't seem to be such a chaos of talus—broken rock, you know—tumbled down from the peak. And the peak was n't a peak. It was more like a queer-shaped, flat stone set on a rock pedestal. 'It 's all right,' the man kept saying to himself, as they pushed on, 'I shall feel it was worth it, once I 'm on the top.' And they went on and on. All of a sudden the man looked up, and realized that the feeling that had been haunting him was justified. The rock up there was like a giant anvil. So like, it was almost uncanny to think nature could have carved a stone with such whimsical exactness. 'Just wait till I get up there,' he said again, half-laughing to himself; 'see if I don't hammer out *something!*' and he forgot his wound and how it hurt him to walk, and he jumped across a water hole to a

higher knoll and saw that the ground on the other side fell gently down to a shallow valley. And the valley held a little stream in its lap. The white man realized when he saw that, how thirsty he was. He had n't dared to drink out of the standing pools on the tundra, and he went as fast as he could away from the anvil, and down the slope to the running water. He saw a dash of something white on the edge of the bank, as he hurried down to the creek, and he knew in the back of his head that it was a little heap of weather-bleached bones that shone so, off there in the grass. But he never stopped till he stood by the bed of the stream. He took up the water in his double hands and drank. It was good water, and he 'd never been so thirsty before in his life. But the water spilled away through his fingers, and he felt he should never get enough. So he balanced himself over some stones, and he lay on his stomach, and reached his lips to the clear water. He drank and drank, with his half-shut eyes fixed on a spark of mica, that caught the light and was shining like a diamond under the water. No, it was n't mica. He saw plainer now. He leaned over a little further, and picked the bit of pyrites out of the wet gravel. The Esquimau boy saw the white man stand up as suddenly as if he 'd been stung. But he held on to the thing he had taken into his palm, and he lifted his hand, like this, several times, and he turned the thing over and over, weighing it. One place in the stained, brassy-looking thing had been scratched, and every time the light caught that new abrasion, it glinted. The white man took out his knife and cut the substance. It was gold!''

''*Weal* gold?'' said Jack Galbraith, gathering up his sprawled-out body with a squirrel-like quickness.

"Real gold," answered Mar. "'Any more stuff like this about?' the white man asked. The native looked at the nugget, and shrugged indifferently. The white man dug about in the gravel with his hands and a sharp stone, and then he sat down and thought, with his eyes on the place where the nugget had been. The Esquimau boy got out his bird-dart, and went off a little way after a jack-snipe. The white man knew he ought to make a miner's assay."

"What 's vat?"

"That 's 'panning.' If he 'd had a round pan like Sigma's bread pan, he 'd have put some sand and gravel in it, and he would fill it to the brim with water, and he 'd wash the sand and gravel round and round, picking out all the stones and letting off the water little by little, with a circular motion—so. And all the lighter sand and stuff would get washed out; and by and by, if the miner knows his business, any gold that may have been in that sand, every particle, is left behind in the bottom of the pan."

"Gwacious! Vat *would* be luck!" said Jack, with enthusiasm.

"No, it is n't luck. It 's skill and specific gravity."

"Why did n't ve man twy it?"

"He had n't any pan. He had n't even a shovel. I 've seen it done very cleverly with a shovel. I 've seen it done with a saucer. He had nothing. How was he going to find out if there was any more of that stuff there? Had this one nugget by any chance been dropped? No, that was absurd. Who could have dropped it? But he looked up the bank where the bones shone, and out of the coarse grass a skull grinned at him. Not a wolf's skull, or a

deer's, as he 'd thought. A human being's—a white man's, perhaps. Had the nugget belonged to him? Had he brought it from some valley far away, and lost his bit of gold as well as his life here under the shadow of the great stone anvil? The graver the man got down there by the water, the broader the one on the bank seemed to grin. Suddenly the living man got up, and ran toward that heap of bones as if he could n't rest till he 'd found out what the joke was the dead man was laughing at. He picked up the skull, and he saw it was a white man's."

"How could he see vat?"

"He looked at the teeth. They were splendid. Good as any savage's—all but one—one was filled. When he saw that, the castaway knew that probably this white man, who had been here before him, had dropped that nugget in the creek—or it had been washed down there after the wolves had torn the dead man's clothes. But who could tell! 'Look here,' the live man asked, 'what *did* happen?' But the other would n't say a word, just went on grinning in that irritating way of his. So the live man picked up two stones, and got out his big clasp-knife, and he went at that skull with might and main, sawing at it with the knife (which was no good at all), and hammering with first one stone and then another, working away like one possessed."

"Did he weally fink he could make ve skull tell him somefing?" and Jack Galbraith laughed aloud at so foolish an adventurer.

"Seemed as if he thought he 'd get *some* satisfaction out of it, from the way he kept on. By the time the Esquimau boy got back with the jack-snipe, the white man had hammered away everything from that skull except

the round basin of the cranium—this part, you know. The Esquimau boy was horrified, and made signs of disapproval.

"'Just you wait,' said the white man. He took the bone bowl down to the bank. He filled it full, and three times he 'panned' the gravel of that creek. *And every time he got gold!*"

"Gwacious!" said Jack, in an excited whisper.

"Yes," agreed Mr. Mar, "when he saw colors the third time he just poured the stuff wet into his handkerchief, and told the Esquimau boy he was ready to go now. As he went up the bank, he passed the bones again. 'I wonder if he knew!' the castaway thought, and as he went on he thought more and more, and he got solemner and solemner. He said to himself: 'A gold mine will do me just about as much good as it did Old Bones, if I have to stay up here with the Esquimaux. We 'll go back the other way,' he called to the boy, and the boy did n't think much of the plan. But the white man kept looking all round in every direction, to see if there was the least little trail leading anywhere, or the smallest human sign. Only those bones shining so white down there on the bank! The castaway went on, feeling pretty sick and anxious, till he looked straight up and saw off there against the blue, that great anvil, plainer than ever. The nose quite sharp and finely cut, the top as flat as our dining-table, and the waist gouged in exactly as a real anvil is. 'Well, I won't give up going to the top,' he said out loud, 'and if there *are* any settlements—' It was a crazy thing to do, but he did it; and when he got to the top he saw something he would n't have seen in time, if he had n't climbed Anvil Rock."

"What did he see?" Jack gathered together his sprawled-out body and sat up.

Mar's eyes looked over the little boy's head into space. "No settlements. Beyond the creek, barren hills to the north. No hope that way. East and west the tundra stretched to the horizon line level as the ocean. No hope right or left. He turned round and saw off there to the south the coast where he 'd been wrecked, and the sand-spit the Esquimaux were making ready to leave, and beyond that, against the horizon—what was that! He nearly fell off the rock. For a two-masted schooner was lying a couple of miles off the shore. Two masts! It flashed over him those were the two poles he 'd seen sticking up above the tundra, several hours before. Well, he got down off that rock double quick, and he nearly killed himself tearing back to the coast, and signaling the ship. He was only just in time—they were weighing anchor."

"Well," said Jack, with a long breath of relief, "it *was* a good fing he climbed vat funny hill!"

"Y—yes," said Nathaniel Mar. His tone was hardly satisfactory.

"Did n't he get back to his fwiends all wight?"

"Oh, yes, he got back all right."

"What did vey say when he told vem about ve gold?"

"He did n't tell anybody about that just then."

"Why not?"

"If he had, somebody might have rushed there and cleaned the whole creek out, before he had a chance."

"Oh! How soon did he go back?"

"He—he did n't go."

Jack sat there wide-eyed. "W—why did n't he?"

"Mar's eyes looked over the little boy's head into space"

"Well, you see, he had a pretty bad time with that leg of his."

"Oh, it was his leg, was it?"

"A—yes—his leg. He kept waiting for the doctors to cure it. Instead of curing it they kept cutting off little bits of it."

"Ow! Well—and after vat, when it *did* get well."

"It did n't."

"And was he lame always, like you?"

"Something like me."

"Why did n't *he* get a store leg, too?"

"He did, I believe—ultimately."

"And was n't it any good?"

"It was n't quite the same as the one he 'd lost."

"Oh, no." Jack realized that, with a creep down his back. He could still feel the dreadful touch of it on his fingers. "But I suppose he sent somebody else up after vat gold?"

"N—no."

"Well, what *did* he do?"

"He—he got married."

"Oh—h. And after vat?"

"Then he got a post of some sort—not easy to get, still harder to leave."

"And—"

"And then he got some children. Oh, he was always getting things, that fellow! Once it was intermittent fever. Anyhow he had to stay where he was."

"Ven who got ve gold?"

"Nobody. Not yet."

"Ve gold is waitin' vere now?" Jack jumped to his feet with dancing eyes.

"So—a—so he says."

"Oh—*oh!*" Then with an air of fiery impatience: "What you say vat man 's doin' now?"

"He—well—I understand he 's hanging on to that post."

"Hangin' on a post!" Jack colored as Mar laughed, and added hurriedly, "Just waitin' to see if vat leg won't get better, I s'pose."

"Waiting for—several things."

Jack came closer. "Oh, *does n't* he mean to never mind his leg, and go back some day?"

"I would n't be surprised if he had times of thinking he would go back *somehow*. After he 's educated his children, and got them off his hands, and can afford to take risks. Or, if the worst comes to the worst, his sons will go one day."

"Or *I* might go," said Jack, quickly.

Mar smiled and fell silent. Jack walked away with his hands in his breeches pockets, and his eyes big with dreams. The opening of the door made them both start.

"Did n't I tell you not to get out of that chair till supper?" Mrs. Mar demanded. She stood there with the butter dish in one hand and the milk pitcher in the other, snapping her bright eyes at the culprit.

He for his part had turned about sharply, and he fell from the infinite skies with a bump.

"I—I—" he stammered, backing against the bookcase.

"It 's on the lower shelf," said Mar, calmly. "The heavy brown book." Jack turned again, utterly bewildered, but following the direction indicated by Mr. Mar's walking-stick.

"That 's 'Franklin's Second Voyage,' next the dictionary. Yes, that 's what I want. I think," he went on to his wife, as Jack stooped to obey him, "I think I must always keep a small prisoner in here, to hand me things out of my reach."

She answered nothing as she set down the butter and the milk, but she kept her eyes on Jack.

"Oh, yes," he was saying hurriedly, "vis is Fwanklin." He carried the book to his friend.

"Fwanklin!" repeated that gentleman with affectation of scorn, as he opened the book. "Now, sir, go back to your seat and practice your R's. It 's ridiculous for a boy of your age to be talking baby talk."

"Yes, sir," said Jack, getting very red as he returned to his place. Mrs. Mar stood at the sideboard making a dressing for the salad. Every now and then she looked over her shoulder. But Jack sat impeccable in the penitential chair, saying softly, but with careful emphasis:

"Awound ve wugged wocks ve wagged wascal wan. Awound ve,"—but his eyes were too shining to show a mind properly bent upon the course pursued by that particular wascal.

After supper, while Mrs. Mar was putting Trennor and Harry to bed, Jack Galbraith looked everywhere he could think of for his book. No, Mr. Mar had n't seen it. "Here, I 'll lend you mine. You 'll understand some of the chapter about,"—and he turned the pages till he found the place, and he put in a slip of paper. "There! Franklin did n't find what he was looking for, but he 's written the best travel book I know."

"Oh, fank you, sir." Jack took the big volume in both arms, and was making off with it.

"And look here, Jack, about that other fellow—the man who did find something up there, you and I won't tell anybody about that."

"Oh!" He stopped and nodded at Mar over the great book. "All wight. But I may speak to *you* about it sometimes—"

"When we 're alone."

"All wight. Has n't he," Jack lowered his tone to conspirator's pitch, "has n't he ever told anybody but you?"

"Oh, he 's told one or two. But in confidence, you know. People he can trust."

Jack pulled himself up proudly. "I can keep secrets like anyfing." But again he lowered his voice, and smiling delightedly, "What do vey say," he demanded with lively anticipation, "vose ovvers, when vey hear about it?"

Mr. Mar did not answer instantly.

Jack drew nearer, still clasping the great book. "Oh, *do* tell me what vey say."

"They—they think he dreamed it."

"B—b—but," Jack stuttered with indignation, "does n't he show vem ve nugget, and ve handkerchief wiv ve—"

"No," said Mar, sadly. "He lost that handkerchief somewhere on the tundra."

CHAPTER III

NOT for several years had Mar made mention of the far northern experience which, beside laming him for life, had as yet but one visible effect upon his circumstances—that of ruining his credit as a man of judgment among those nearest to him.

People had recognized Nathaniel Mar as one marked out for misfortune, when, upon his father's death, he had been obliged to give up his theological studies, and come back from college, to take the first thing that offered him a little ready money for the assistance of his mother. His modest salary as surveyor's clerk was presently augmented, in recognition of his good draftsmanship and his surprisingly quick mastery of the new field. But it was not till the work he did the following year, over in the Rock Hill district, brought him the friendship of the prosperous young mine owner Galbraith, that Mar found an opportunity of following the more scientific side of his new profession. It was Galbraith who got him the post on the Coast Survey, that led to Mar's joining the Russian-American Expedition.

After his return the handsome schoolmistress, who had reluctantly said "no" to the penniless surveyor, consented to look with favor upon the Discoverer of Gold in the new territory of Alaska.

But she warmly opposed Mar's design of going to Rock Hill to share the great secret with his friend Galbraith. No, indeed! The Rock Hill mining magnate was in small need of "tips." It was clearly Mar's duty to give the men of Miss Trennor's family the first chance of joining in this glorious scheme that was to enrich them all.

When Harriet Trennor called the Trennor brothers "the men of her family," she made the most of what was a second cousinship. It was even the case that she was not on very good terms with those go-ahead young gentlemen; for the Trennors, in spite of their prosperity, had never, as she expressed it, "done anything" for her. It had been for the sake of her old father that they had bestirred themselves sufficiently to recommend Harriet for the post of assistant superintendent of the Girls' College of Valdivia. But after providing her with an opportunity to leave their common birthplace in St. Joseph, Missouri, the Trennors and their respective wives had, in point of fact, neglected Miss Harriet to such a degree, that there would be a certain magnificence in her heaping coals of fire on their heads. She, the poor relation, whom they had so little regarded, would put it in the way of men merely well-off to become millionaires. They would learn her worth at last!

Yes, yes, Nathaniel must keep the great secret close, till the Trennors (who were in New York on their yearly business trip) should have returned. But the affairs of the brothers took them to Mexico, and their home coming was further delayed.

While they tarried acute pneumonia appeared upon the Rock Hill scene, and carried off John Galbraith. Little part in Mar's grief at the loss of his best-loved friend

was played by the thought that now he could not count upon his "backing." Galbraith took with him out of the world something that to a man of Mar's temperament meant more. And at that time he looked upon himself as possessor of a secret that any capitalist in the country would hold himself lucky to share. It was not till the return of his wife's cousins that he found there could be exceptions to this foregone conclusion.

As enterprising dabblers in real estate and mining, and with the Palmas Valley Bank behind them, the Trennor brothers were constantly being approached by people with schemes for making millions. Such persons, though almost invariably as poor as Mar, were not often, the Trennor brothers agreed, ready with propositions so fantastic.

Alaska was in those days further away from men's imaginations than Patagonia. The few people who had anything to say about the newly acquired territory, used it only as a club to belabor the then secretary of state. What had he been thinking of to advise his foolish country to pay seven millions for the barren rocks and worthless ice-fields that astute Russia, after one hundred and twenty-six years' attempt at occupation, was so ready to abandon!

"Worthless!" retorted Secretary Seward's friends. "Why, the Seal Islands alone—"

"Yes, yes, the Seal Islands *are* alone on the credit side of the transaction. Seward gave those seven millions for the two little Pribyloffs, and the value of Alaska may be gaged by the fact that it was just thrown in."

Was it to be believed, the Trennors asked, was it *likely* there was gold in a place where fellows with such

keen noses as the Russians—they shook their heads. Both of them shook their heads, for the Trennor brothers always did everything together. Who could believe it had been left for a man like Mar—besides, that gold should be up there was dead against the best geologic opinion of the day. The precious metal had never been found under these conditions. There were reasons, scientific reasons, as anybody but Mar would know, why gold could n't exist in just that formation (they spoke as if the vast new realm boasted but one). And, finally, even if there *was* gold in such a place, how the dickens was it going to be got out?

It was in the talk about mining facilities that Mar's own faith suffered the first of many hurts.

He was obliged to concede that these astute young men were well-informed as regards the difficulties and disappointments of mining, even in a land where transport was easy, food cheap, and labor plentiful—a land blessed by running water and perpetual summer. No less was Mar constrained to admit that this gold he believed he had found was hidden in a barren corner of the uttermost North, where not even an occasional tree promised timber for sluice boxes, where the winter was nine months long, and where, even in summer, the soil six inches below the surface was welded with the frost of ages.

They were surprised, the Trennors said, that any one should expect them to take stock in such a—

Oh, he did n't (Mar hastened to defend himself), he did n't at all expect—it was only that his wife had begged him to come to them first.

And they smiled. They always smiled when Mar's

mad notion was mentioned. Even after it ceased to be actually mentioned, they had for his mere name a particular kind of tolerant, distant-cousin-by-marriage smile that said "poor Mar," with an accent on the adjective.

The new Mrs. Mar was at first boundlessly indignant with her kinsmen. "Never mind," she adjured her husband, with flashing eyes; as soon as he should be able to travel, they would go up there themselves. She seemed unobservant of the fact that his spirits were not raised by her kind proposition. They would have no trouble, she assured him, in finding worthier partners to join them in the great scheme when once they had "made sure."

"Made sure?" said Mar, wincing; "but I *have* made sure."

"Yes, yes, of course. Still you did lose the nugget—and the gold dust, too."

For the first time Mar changed the subject.

"You have n't anything *to show,*" she persisted. To which he answered nothing.

Shortly after they were married, Mar's mother became very ill. The following spring she died. Mar's own health and spirits were a good deal lowered by the surgical torment he was called on periodically to undergo, as amputation followed amputation.

Meanwhile, without waiting to "go up there and make sure," two efforts on Mrs. Mar's part to interest moneyed men in her husband's discovery, resulted not alone in failing to convince any one else that this was a fine opportunity for investment, but ultimately in undermining her own faith.

With the coming of her first child she prepared to cast

overboard the wild hope (she saw now that it *was* wild) of a fortune up yonder in the ice-fields, and showed herself wisely ready to make what she could out of the saner possibilities life presented in Valdivia. Her cousins had been right. She would n't admit it to them—not yet—but it was a crazy scheme, that notion of gold in the arctic regions!

Dreamer as he was, Mar missed nothing of the intended effect when she first ceased to talk about his discovery—ceased to plan all life with that fact for its corner-stone. Her initial silence hurt him probably more than the half-veiled taunts of a later time. It was all the difference between the shrinking of an open wound and the dull beating of an ancient cicatrice.

Not only, as time went on, did she resent the illusion she had been under, but, as is common with women of her type, her husband's greater significance since motherhood had come to her, made her increasingly dread that foolish infatuation of his. She foresaw that a continued faith in the value of his "find" would stand between him and energetic pursuit of fortune in any other direction. So it was that the North was not merely for her, as time went on, the type of a shattered dream—it came to be her and her babies' rival in this man's thoughts. This man—who owed to them all his thoughts, all his faith and energy—he was divided in his allegiance.

And not in dreams alone might he desert them. He might even conceivably insist, against all rational advice and plain duty, he might insist on going back there! The mere idea of his fatuous clinging to the old plan came to exercise over her an almost uncanny power for misery. Not that he continued openly to admit his pre-

occupation. But it was there—she was sure of that—in his head, more properly in his heart, his refuge, his darling, his delight. She came to feel for it the hatred, and to have before it the involuntarily nerve recoil, that lies for some wives in the thought of another woman. What if she never succeeded in rooting the fancy out of his brain? How was she at least to make sure of preventing his squandering time and money in pursuit of it?—now, when she could not go too, and when his going would mean (as she honestly thought) disaster to her and to the children and the humiliation of falling back for cousinly help on those wise young Missourians, who had seen at once the madness of the scheme.

She patched up the breach with her two kinsmen, and induced them to offer her husband a small position in their bank.

That would hold him.

But although she succeeded in seeing the cripple made teller—as a first step, she was firmly convinced, on the road to a partnership—she was not delivered from her fear. The unspoken dread that he might throw aside the humble, though precious, "sure thing" for this chimera beckoning from the North—the dread of it became the main factor in their spiritual relation. For not only did she never free herself from her grudging love of the man—and never, therefore, from her shrinking at the prospect of separation—not only did she conceive of him in the American way as the property of his family and bound as bondsmen are to serve them to the end, but in addition to all that, more and more as the years went on, did she come profoundly to disbelieve in the validity of his story.

"Do you still think you may go back there one day?" she burst out on one occasion, looking darkly at the reconnaissance map that hung on the dining-room wall. Mar mumbled something about the satisfaction in the verifying of an impression.

"Verifying *what?* How do you verify pure fancy?" Then turning suddenly upon him, "If ever you do go, you 'll only be giving a fantastic reason for a restless man's longing to leave his home."

At moments conceived by her to be critical, she would toss at him the reproach of his well-known visionariness, and all their old foolish hope and its utter loss would be held up to scorn in her saying, apropos of something quite foreign: "That 's like some one I once knew who wanted people to believe in a miracle. But not without proof, he said. He *had* proof—absolute proof—only he 'd lost it." Or, less offensive, but for Mar no less pointed, the form of skepticism his loss of the nugget had crystallized for her, "You 've got to have something to *show* to a Missourian."

This was later not only adopted by her boys as a favorite family gibe, but introduced into their school, and thence spread abroad as a foolish and pointless saying sometimes will, no one quite knowing why, till all of that generation, whatever their origin, would say with a wag of the head: "You 've got to *show* me—I 'm from Missouri," whenever they wished to announce themselves acute fellows by no means to be taken in.

As to the particular matter that gave rise to the saying, Mrs. Mar's strong personal feeling about it was augmented by outside circumstances. Stories of failure in gold mining were too rife and too well-attested not to

have a significance difficult to disregard. Blameless misfortune as well as wholesale swindling, were so much the order of the day in the West, that men of business like the Trennors, when they wanted to promote some mining scheme, must needs have recourse to the gorgeous East. New York had plenty of money for "wildcat" schemes. But no place, the wise would tell you, like conservative old Boston for floating a risky concern. New Englanders were at that distance which lends enchantment. For them gold mining is still a form of romance—the mere thought of it goes to the head like wine.

But Valdivia was neither near enough to the mining centers to catch the fever, nor yet so far away but what her citizens mightily feared infection. Had not their townsman, Ben White, lost his head and his fortune over at Huerfano Creek? Was n't there young Andrews for a warning!

No catastrophe of this kind in their little world lost through Mrs. Mar's agency any of its ironic usefulness as illustration. She succeeded not only in making her husband doubt the wisdom of giving up a sure thing in the bank, to claim an unworkable gold mine, but little by little, as the rain and the weather wear away the sharp outlines of a stone inscription, so for Nathaniel Mar the years and the unbelief about him brought a gradual blurring of the picture, till even to himself its early outlines were a little dimmed.

To revive its actuality, more than for any other purpose, nearly ten years after he had told the story to little Jack Galbraith, he told it again to Mr. Elihu H. Cox. The man listened with such a look in his big, fishy eyes, in a silence so galling, that Mar interposed hurriedly:

"And there 's one capital thing about it. It 's safe enough. If the gold 's there, it certainly won't run away," and abruptly changed the subject; though to hear himself saying "if it 's there," rankled in his memory like apostasy. He would never tell the story again till his boys were grown and he told it to them. *They* would believe him. They, with youth and four sound legs between them, they would go up there and justify the long faith.

For fear that he might die before they were old enough to be indoctrinated, he wrote out as circumstantial an account as he could between intervals of black despair at finding how dim were certain details. He grappled with the horror and saw it recede before the draftsman's skill and his peerless satisfaction in preparing careful diagrams and a map to larger scale. There was an effect of mathematical accuracy about these illustrations of his account that gave him back his confidence. If there was any trifling difference between these data and those furnished upon his return, the apparent discrepancy lay in the essential impressionism of mere words. The compass and the rule can't lie. He put the precious document away with his will, in the vault of the Palmas Valley Bank, but he did not put away the thought of it. On the contrary, he kept it by him day and night, turning it over in his mind with the rich comfort of the man who reflects that he will leave to his children a handsome inheritance and a fund of gratitude. Something in this case that partook of the nature of a paternal life-insurance—the kind of thing that had not profited, could not profit the giver, except as it profited him to feel that for all his appearance of being one of life's failures, he yet

had insured his children against the meaner assaults of fortune. For this "policy" that he held for them was "paid up." Oh, yes, Nathaniel Mar had paid heavily—not yearly, but daily, almost hourly, for his lien upon the riches of the North.

The thought of the gold-shotted creek between the Great Stone Anvil and the arctic circle comforted him not least when he looked at his little daughter. It was good to know—the knowledge helped him through many a difficult hour—that Hildegarde would never be forced to join the ever fuller ranks of the bread-winning women. It would be no hurt to her that, however great an heiress she might be, she had been frugally brought up.

There was something large and fine and tranquil about the Scandinavian-looking girl, whom her parents had called by the stately northern name with more luck than attends many a christening—since it is well-known Victoria is, like as not, to take on an aspect depressed and down-trodden; Grace to turn out clumsy and hideous; while Ivy shows a sturdy independence, and Blanche and Lily grows swarthy as a squaw.

But the fact was that the little Mar girl was named Harriet Hildegarde, and was even called "Hattie" till she was nearly twelve, when, after remarking one day, "I don't look like a Hattie, and I 'm not going to be a Hattie," she refused thereafter to hear the obnoxious diminutive and quietly but firmly coerced her family and her schoolmates into saying "Hildegarde," if they wanted her to notice them.

Mrs. Mar was grieved to find that her only daughter had no conspicuous talents, and was not even a girl of

spirit—lacked, moreover, the will to cultivate that affectation of being spirited, which goes in America by the name of "brightness." But she was not a bad sort of little girl after all; she got her lessons, and played games with a certain boyish gusto, and gardened with a patient devotion that her mother thought worthy of a better cause. But Mrs. Mar consoled herself for the girl's lack of brilliancy by reflecting that Hildegarde was probably going to be handsome and that men were great donkeys and might never find out that she was slow.

Hildegarde herself was conscious of her shortcomings—without the knowledge overwhelming her. Life was going to be very good, even if she was n't at the head of the class, or a shining light at the school commencements. She had no talent for music, and quite as little for recitation. It was something to hear her saying, in the famous garden scene—

> "Geh' falsche gleissnerische Königin
> Wie du die Welt so täusch' ich Dich—"

in a tone of unruffled courtesy and with a brow serene. When the fiery Madeleine Smulsky took her off with, "This is Hildegarde laying dark plots—now she 's doing foul murder," and proceeded to translate her friend's large tranquillity into the feverish terms of picturesque wickedness, the effect was distinctly diverting. Even Hildegarde laughed. For she got over "minding." It was when she was quite little that she had suffered most, and from the scorn of her own family. Her brothers were both "such very bright boys," and her mother she knew to be enormously clever. It had been painful to

feel that beside these richly dowered ones, she was "next door to an idiot." She made no outward struggle against the verdict of her family, accepting it as many a young creature will, without a doubt of its being as just as final. But, fortunately, hers was a nature too sane and sunny for her to run the risk many children do of coming nervously to dread, and so making true, a prophecy having no foundation in necessity. When she discovered that she had competent hands—hands with which she could perform all manner of pleasant domestic miracles—that gradually, and because of her, the house was transformed and the garden made to smile; that, moreover (assuring her of a hold upon the fine arts, too), she could tell ghost stories that made her school friends gibber with excitement, the girl felt agreeably conscious that her destiny after all was maybe larger than the family eye had been able to discern.

When Hildegarde was sixteen a new pupil appeared at the Valdivia School for Young Ladies. A little girl hardly twelve, delicate, pretty, appealing, yet self-sufficing; so backward in some of her studies, and so advanced in others, that she could not be entered in either the upper primary or lower academic classes, but was sent to recite arithmetic and geography with the infants, Latin with the first academic girls, and French with the second collegiates—young ladies four to six years older than little Bella Wayne.

She was a boarder, and it was said her parents had put her under the special care of Miss Gillow, the principal. She even had special dishes cooked for her, and the fact that these "milk puddings" (as it seemed they were called) were plainer than the food set before the other

boarders, did nothing to mitigate the offensiveness of the distinction. Certainly the principal accorded the "new girl" so many privileges that a strong party sprang up against her.

Hildegarde, even before a certain day of wrath, had found herself unconsciously absorbed in watching this thin slip of prettiness, who looked as if a puff of wind would blow her away, who ought to have carried herself humbly, if not actually depressed, in her capacity of unclassifiable new-comer, and who yet walked about with her little nose in the air, as if she despised Valdivia, and especially scorned the critical young ladies of Valdivia's celebrated school.

It did not help her good standing that she showed herself indifferent to an opportunity of joining the Busy Bees. Now, the Busy Bees were a very popular organization which not only sewed on alternate Saturday afternoons at the rectory, but danced with an equal regularity, in various other places, and organized a bazaar once a year in the Masonic Hall. Besides the gaiety of this function, there was a fine flavor of philanthropy about the regular application of the proceeds to the clothing and educating of a little Hindu girl, who was able strangely soon to write pious letters to the young ladies of Valdivia—letters in which she seemed to get even with her benefactors by saying that she never forgot to pray for them. The Bees had had the joy of deciding by what name their protégé should be christened. As there were three Marys and six Trennors among them, the little Hindu was called Mary Trennor, and every properly constituted girl felt pledged for Mary Trennor's material and spiritual welfare—that is, every girl in Valdivia

whose fortunate social condition permitted her to aspire to wear the badge of the Golden Bee. It followed that the new girl was not properly constituted when she declined the honor. It was even apparent that her heart was not in the right place. For when Beatrice Trennor most forbearingly showed the new girl the framed photograph of the Hindu convert, in order to stimulate interest in the cause, Miss Bella Wayne turned from it with the observation, "She 's ugly. I shan't do a single thing for such a hideous little girl. I don't think they ought to be encouraged."

It was plain, therefore, that she thought too much of good looks, and was a stony-hearted monster.

"Serves her right," said primaries, academics and collegiates all with one voice, when Bella Wayne, having for a week daily put the arithmetic class to shame, was banished to Miss MacIver's room to spend two hours in austere solitude over the lesson of the day.

Hildegarde had got special permission to go for ten minutes after school hours to visit Madeleine Smulsky (also a boarder), who was in bed with a violent cold. Coming down-stairs, as Hildegarde passed Miss MacIver's room she saw the door cautiously open. A spectacled eye gleamed strangely low down in the aperture for one of Miss MacIver's height, and then the owner of the eye, as if reassured by the look of things outside, opened the door a little wider, and the apparition stood fully revealed. Miss MacIver, many inches shorter than anybody had ever seen her before, and narrowed in proportion, the familiar crochet shawl hanging dowdily over one shoulder, the stiff-held head ornamented with the front of sandy curls, a gouty finger held crookedly

up, the effect of cold in the nose faithfully reproduced as the voice twanged out:

"Neow young ladies, observe—" It was the arithmetic teacher to the life, only it was Bella Wayne, with her perky little nose supporting huge round spectacles, and her baby mouth pursed in severity repeating the rule, "One or bore of the decibal divisiods of a unid are galled a decibal fragtion."

Hildegarde had stopped, stared, and was seized with uncontrollable giggles. Madeleine Smulsky, hearing these demonstrations, got up out of bed and made all haste to thrust her bare toes through the banisters, and crane a tousled head far enough over the rail to discover what was happening below. Her ecstatic merriment induced Miss Wayne to come further into the hall, and reprove her with a supple young finger stiffly crooked, and speaking not only with a cold in the head, but with that intolerable click in the nose of the sufferer from chronic catarrh—

"I would lige yeou do observe there is a sbezial beaudy aboud the laws of bathebadigs—" Again the dreadful noise in the impudent little nose. Madeleine's attempt to suppress her laughter brought on a fit of coughing, which, with a spasmodic suddenness, choked and died in her throat. For all of a sudden there were three figures in the hall below, and one of them was the real Miss MacIver, saying to herself in miniature:

"And now, Miss Wayne, you may take off my shawl, and my skirt, and my glasses." (Not a syllable about the opulent front.) "And in ten minutes go and report to the principal."

As the real Miss MacIver, six feet of indignation,

"It was the teacher of arithmetic to the life, only it was Bella Wayne"

turned away trembling with fury, she looked back an instant over her shoulder to say: "You or I, Biss Wayne, bust leave Valdivia—"

But Bella had already vanished into the room of penitence, and was feverishly pulling off her strange habiliments. The bare toes of Miss Smulsky had been hurriedly withdrawn from between the banisters, and any girl but Hildegarde Mar would have been fleeing down the staircase, "and so home." But she walked quietly away, her large deliberateness even a little emphasized as she went, weighed down by fearful speculation as to what form of retribution would overtake the wicked, new girl.

Hildegarde went to school the next morning ten minutes earlier than usual. No one yet in the big schoolroom, so she wandered restlessly through the empty halls, wishing she dared go up-stairs and compare notes with Madeleine. From a window at the back, looking out on a group of eucalyptus trees and a mass of syringa, she saw little Bella Wayne sitting very subdued on the topmost of two stone steps; slate on knee and pencil poised, but eyes fastened on a woodpecker tap-tap-tapping at the tree.

Hildegarde went out and spoke kindly to the unlucky little girl. "What 's happened since—?"

"Nothing much," and Bella put up her chin.

"Are you—are you going away?"

"Me? No." And with that she dropped her slate and pencil on the step, dropped her face into her two hands, and wept.

Hildegarde thought she had misheard—it must be that Bella was crying because she was expelled. After

all Hildegarde had expected she would be expelled. What she had not expected was that she, one of the big girls, would be so sorry to hear that this was the last she should see of little Bella Wayne. Hildegarde picked up the broken slate, and tried to think of something comforting.

"I was *sure* they 'd send me home," Bella sobbed. "But they w-won't! Not even if I d-don't beg her p-pardon."

"And you *want* to be sent home!"

"Of course!" Bella got out a handkerchief three inches square and dabbed her eyes.

"Was that why you did it?"

"No. It *would* have been if I 'd thought she 'd come and catch me. But—no—I did it because—oh, because there was n't any other earthly thing to do in that room!" she said, with a burst. Then, more collectively: "Were you ever in Miss MacIver's room?"

"No. I 've always been rather afraid of Miss MacIver."

"Well, wait till you 've seen her room—and her family! You 'll be 'fraider than ever. The only pictures she has in there are photographs of a lot of nightmarey people all just like her. Oh, it was dreadful being shut up there with millions of MacIvers! I did everything I could think of to forget 'em. I looked at all her dull books. Then I smelt all her bottles—*they* are n't so dull. Do you know she 's got seventeen on her washstand?"

"Not bottles!"

"Bottles. When I 'd smelt them all—some very queer—what else *was* there to take your mind off those pictures but to try on her things?"

The three-minute bell began to ring, and Hildegarde went back to the school-room.

Bella did not reappear among her kind for twenty-four hours. Some said she 'd already gone home. Others said no, she was waiting till her mother came for her. Certainly Miss MacIver made no sign; but her cold seemed better.

Upon resuming her place the next day, Bella, still with her nose in the air, publicly announced that she had begged Miss MacIver's pardon.

"How did they make you do it?" Hildegarde asked the little girl at recess.

The wicked Miss Wayne was again sitting solitary on the stone steps among the shrubbery at the back, holding on her knees a new slate, the lower part covered with neat little figures—the upper elegantly decorated with dragons.

"*No*body made me," answered Bella, while she carefully shaded the scaly coil on the monster's tail. "The door was a little bit open—Miss MacIver's door—and I saw her packing up. Then she looked out and caught me peeking at her."

"Heavens!" breathed Hildegarde, so overcome she sat down. "What happened then?"

"Oh, I went in."

"She called you?"

"No."

"You did n't go in without being made to?"

"Yes, I did."

"Gracious! How *could* you, Bella?"

"I thought I 'd better. I went in and asked her pardon."

"What did she say?"

"She just"—the outrageous Bella made the obnoxious clicking in her nose. "Do you know she 's only got two dresses?"

"Yes, I 've noticed."

"But she 's very well off for fronts."

"Is she?"

Bella nodded. "Got three."

"You don't mean to tell me, Bella Wayne, Miss MacIver 's got three false fronts!"

"Yes, she has. And the weeest little, teenty-weenty trunk, she 's got. But it 's quite big enough. I could see she had n't anything, hardly, to put in it. Only bottles and fronts. After I 'd begged pardon, and was going out, I suddenly thought she must be pretty poor, even if she did have such a lot of—do you suppose it 's because she can't afford hats? Well, I don't know. Anyhow I asked her what school she was going to after this. She said she did n't know. Then I looked at those nightmarey MacIvers and asked her if she was going home. She suddenly began to look awfuller than ever. I saw *she* was thinking about the MacIvers, too, and it was 'most more than she could bear. So I ran back and begged her not to go. I said I did so need her."

"You needed her?"

"Yes, to—to teach me decimal fractions." Bella brought out the words a little shamefaced. Then, hurriedly, as if to forestall misapprehension: "Oh, I *said* I knew it was n't much of an attraction for her—of course, it must be perfectly horrid to have a girl like me in the arithmetic class. But, after all"—Bella paused, and then, with the air of a discoverer of one of the deeper mysteries of nature—"after all, Miss MacIver *likes* ham-

mering those disgusting rules into girls. What she hates is to think there 's a girl going round without those rules somewhere inside her. So I just told her that wherever she was going she would n't find anybody who knew as little about fractions as I did. I was certain I told her, perfectly certain, that she could show me all about 'em if only she was n't going away. One thing was sure as a gun—I was never going to let anybody else teach me! She said something about that. It was the first time she spoke, and she stood like this, with her flannel petticoat in one hand, and a bottle in the other. But I just said: 'Seven people have tried it already, and *you* know if they succeeded. There 's only one person in the world that can make me understand those disgusting rules.' And I went quite close to her, and I said: 'Miss MacIver, cross my heart and hope I may die, if ever I let anybody else *speak* to me about fractions!' So we agreed it was her duty to stay. But now the awful thing is I 've *got* to do these sickening sums! Is n't it terrible what a lot of trouble you can make for yourself, just all in a minute?"

"Well, I hope you 'll stick to your part of the bargain, Bella," said the big girl, smiling.

"Got to—got to!" said the luckless one, flourishing her pencil over the biggest of the dragons. "If I don't she 'll go away and starve with the rest of the MacIvers; or drink up all those medicine bottles, and die in a wink—like that!"

"Look here, shall I just see if you 're going the right way about it?"

"Oh, *thank* you,"—Bella relinquished the slate with alacrity—"only be careful not to rub out my dragons. They keep my mind off the MacIvers."

And that was how the friendship began.

CHAPTER IV

NATHANIEL MAR made the mistake of thinking that you can put off to a given date impressing your good judgment on those who share your life.

Trenn and Harry had an affection for their father—that he without difficulty inspired—but in their heart of hearts they were a little ashamed of their love for him, as a species of weakness. They frankly despised his *laissez-aller* way of life, and looked upon him as a warning. Their mother had seen to that.

The Mar boys, however, had shown business capacity from their childhood, when instead of buying "peanut brittle" and going to the circus, they saved up their money to invest in hens. They made what their mother called "a pretty penny" by selling fresh eggs to the neighbors. The thriving young tradesmen made even their mother pay for whatever she required, and she "planked down the cash" without a murmur. It was a small price for the holy satisfaction of seeing that her children were early learning the value of money.

Mar got less pleasure out of his sons' budding business instincts. He was even obviously annoyed when he discovered that Trenn helped Eddie Cox with his lessons, not out of good comradeship, but at the rate of "two bits" for each half-hour's aid.

"It 's ugly," said Mar, with unusual spirit. His wife felt obliged to point out that she herself had been engaged in very much the same occupation, when he first met her. The "ugliness" of being paid for helping people with their studies had not oppressed him then.

"You were their teacher," said her husband.

"And Trenn is Eddie's teacher while he 's teaching him!" Then as Mar opened his lips, she quickly closed the argument by adding, "Besides, *Eddie's* father has made money and Trenn's father has n't. Eddie Cox will have to buy brains all his life—he may just as well begin now."

Trenn Mar was not yet nineteen when he was so fortunate as to have two business openings. One was to go down to a ranch in southern California and round up cattle for Karl Siegel, and learn all he could for Trenn Mar. The other, to enter the employment of Messrs. Wilks & Simpson, of the Crœsus Creek Mining Company.

Trenn's father meant him to take the latter—in fact he had put himself to an uncommon amount of trouble to get his son this opening. But Trenn was all for the cattle business. "Besides, look at what Siegel offers. It 's wonderful! Those men usually expect a young fellow to buy his experience. But Siegel—"

"Yes," agreed Mar; "it looks better to start with, but that 's not the main thing. You must look ahead."

Trenn opened his brown eyes. He even grinned. "Why yes, I mean to."

"With Wilks & Simpson you 'll get the hang of the best managed placer-mining property in California."

"But that whole blessed country is prospected already. There 's no money in it for me."

"That 's precisely what there is in it."

Trenn looked about the room, impatient to be gone. What did his father know about money? Less than many a sharp boy of twelve.

"Sound mining knowledge," he was saying, "will be very useful. Not only for itself, but because it will bring you into business contact with mining men."

"What good 'll that do me?" demanded the boy, impatiently. "*We* have n't got any capital."

"No, *they 'll* have the capital. You 'll have something more rare."

"What?"

"A great property to develop." Then he told his son the story of the shipwreck, and of those wonderful hours on the farther side of Anvil Rock. Trenn sat and stared. Mar wished he would stop it. It got on his nerves at last, those round, brown eyes, keen, a little hard, fixed in that wide, unwinking gaze.

"So that 's why I say let the cattle business go. Take the small salary that Wilks & Simpson offer, study practical mining, and wait for your chance. In any case, by the time Harry 's left the High School you 'll have some valuable experience to bring into the partnership."

Trenn got up and crossed the room.

"Yes, that 's the place," said Mar, excitedly, thinking the boy's goal was the brown and faded reconnaissance map. But Trenn walked straight past it to the window, and stood looking out, to where the duck-pond used to be, and where now a row of pretentious little pseudo-Spanish "villas" shut out the prospect. And still he did n't speak.

"What I consider so important, is not the practical

knowledge *per se,* though I think it a very real value. Not that so much, as the fact that through associating yourself with that kind of enterprise you are brought into relation with just the men you 'll need to know. If I had n't gone to Rock Hill I would never have met Galbraith. The longer I live, the more I realize it 's through *people*—through having the right sort of human relationships, that work is best forwarded. Here have I lived for nearly twenty years with a secret worth millions, and for lack of knowing the right men—"

"Why did you never tell Charlie Trennor?" the boy turned round to ask.

"Oh, Charlie Trennor! He 's not the sort. But, as a matter of fact, I did once mention the circumstance to the Trennors. Many years ago. But they are men who"—Mar stumbled—"they 'll never do anything very big; they neither one of them have a scintilla of imagination." And then, in sheer excitement, speaking his mind for once: "There never was a Trennor who had."

"I expect," said the boy, doggedly, "there 's a certain amount of Trennor about me. I never noticed that *I* had any imagination to speak of."

Mar was conscious that his own spirit was contracting in a creeping chill. But he said to himself it was only because he had made the mistake of criticizing his wife (by implication) before her son. It was right and proper that Trenn, on such an occasion, should range himself on the side of his mother's family. Mar's conception of loyalty commonly protected him from appearing to pass adverse judgment on the Trennors. But he was excited and overwrought to-day. *He,* not Trenn. All through the story, that for Mar was of such palpi-

tating importance, this well-groomed youth had kept himself so well in hand, that his father, looking at the "correct," cool face, had somewhat modified the presentment of the narrative, had cut description, emotion, wonder, and come to Hecuba as quickly as might be. And yet now that, with as business-like an air as he could muster, he had revealed his great secret—handed over the long-treasured legacy—something still in the judicial young face that gave the older man a sensation of acute self-consciousness, made him in some inexplicable manner feel "cheap."

But he would conquer the ridiculous inclination.

It was for Mar an hour of tremendous significance. He had been waiting for it for eighteen years. "After all," he said, making a fresh start, "you don't need imagination in this case. You need only to use your eyes—"

Trenn lifted his, and the use he made of them was to look at his father. Did n't say a single word. Just looked at the heavily-lined face a moment and then allowed his clear, brown eyes to drop till they rested on the toes of his own immaculate boots.

Hardly more than three seconds between the raising and the lowering of the eyes. Not a sound in the room. And yet between the meeting of that look and the losing of it, Nathaniel Mar passed through the most painful crisis of a life made well acquainted with pain.

There is a special sting in the skepticism of the young. They should be full of faith, inclined even to credulity. Fit task for their elders, the checking of too generous ardor. But for the elder to detect the junior in thinking him foolishly enthusiastic, childishly gullible—there is,

in that conjuncture, something to the older mind quite specially wounding. It passes the limit of mere personal humiliation. It takes on the air of an affront against the seemliness of nature. The elder has betrayed his class and kind—has laid open to callow derision the dignity of the riper years.

Mar waited. And little as he looked like it he was praying. "Oh, my boy, believe me! Have faith that what I say is so. And then I 'll have faith that all the loss will be won back, through *you*, Trenn. I 'll take heart again. It all depends on you. We 'll do great things together, Trenn—you and I—oh, believe, believe!"

But Trennor Mar sat there on the narrow ledge of the window-sill absolutely silent, with his brown eyes on his shining boots.

"I was wrong," said his father, humbly. "I have put you off the track by using the word imagination. It has no place here. I speak to you of fact."

Trenn got up with the brisk air of one who remembers he has business to transact, then pausing for a moment with an eye flown already to find his hat, "I might," he said obligingly, "I might try to get up there some vacation, and have a look round."

He "might." He might *try*. During some idle interval in the real business of life. Once on the spot he would condescend to "look round."

Even his own son could not take the thing seriously.

Well, it began to look as if, after all, they might be right—his wife, Charlie and Harrington Trennor, Elihu Cox, and now Trenn. Mar, the man who believed he had a gold mine in the arctic regions, was a sort of harmless

monomaniac. Sitting there in a sudden darkness that was dashed with self-derision (much was clear in those scorching flashes), Nathaniel Mar met the grim moment when to his own mind he first admitted doubt.

Groping by and by for comfort, he touched the heart of sorrow with "Nothing like this can ever happen to me again."

It was true. In that hour something precious went out of his life. No one, not even Trenn, had any idea what had happened. But every one saw that Nathaniel Mar was changed.

Trenn went to work on Karl Siegel's ranch, and Harry presently announced that he meant to join him. No, he was n't going to finish at the High School. Trenn had an opportunity to go in with Siegel on a new deal, and Harry could be made use of, too, if he came *now*. Such an opportunity might never repeat itself. Mrs. Mar was of the same opinion as the boys, and Harry was in towering good spirits.

His father wondered dully. Ought he not give his younger son the same chance he 'd given the elder, even if, like Trenn, Harry should fail utterly to see how great it was?

Mar shrank from a second ordeal, and yet he knew that, vaguely enough, he had been depending on Harry's helping him to bear Trenn's indifference and unbelief. Had he not for a year now, in any lighter hour, invariably said to himself: "After all, I have two boys. Perhaps Harry will be the one"—yes, he must tell Harry, or the boy might reproach him in time to come.

Trenn's letter had arrived in the morning. All day

Mar revolved in his head how he would present this other "opening" so that Harry— In the end he resolved to take the papers out of the safe, and simply turn them over to his son, as though the father were no longer there to give the story tongue. Mar took the precious packet home with him the same afternoon. Harry was out. That evening he was late for supper, and he came in full of the outfit he 'd been buying.

"Buying an outfit already!" his father exclaimed.

"Of course! *I* don't mean to let the grass grow—"

"Nor Trenn, apparently. I had n't heard that he was financing you."

"He is n't. I had a little saved up, and mother gave me the rest."

Mar stared through his spectacles, and met the bright roving eyes of the lady.

"*You* gave him the rest! How were you able to do that?"

"Oh, I have a pittance in the City Bank."

The rival concern. Even Hildegarde gaped with astonishment at this revelation. Mrs. Mar had not trusted any one to know of this nest-egg—savings out of the "house money," the inadequacy of which had been so often deplored. She seemed to be torn now between regret that its existence should have been revealed, and pride that she had wrung it out of conditions so unpromising.

"Yes," she said, with a spark of anger in her eye, "and you 'll be kind enough, Nathaniel, not to break your arm, or get yourself disabled in any way, for there 's nothing left now for a rainy day. Unless *you* have looked ahead as I 've struggled to—"

He knew that she knew he had not "looked ahead" in her sense of laying by a secret hoard, but the form of her mandate pricked him.

He glanced at the desk for comfort. He had, after all, "looked ahead" in another fashion—as Harry would see. But—again he fell back before the check of an outfit already bought for another purpose. And Harry was talking all the time that he was eating—telling his mother about his prospects and about the letter he had written in answer to Trenn's.

Already he had written! Without an hour's hesitation, or an instant's consultation with his natural adviser. Ah, no, his true "natural adviser" had obviously been invoked, and had responded by offering him the sinews of war. Mar, looking down into his plate, or for occasional refreshment of the spirit into Hildegarde's soft, young face, was nevertheless intensely conscious of the vivid alert personality at the other end of the table. His wife was, as usual, not content to contemplate with idle tranquillity the fruit of some achievement in the past. Strange contrast to her daughter's faculty for extreme stillness, Mrs. Mar presented the stirring spectacle of a person who was always "getting something done," and commonly getting a number of things done at once. If it was only while the plates were being changed, she would pull out of the yellow bag suspended at her belt, a postcard, and with an inch length of pencil would briskly write an order to some tradesman, or she would jump up to straighten a picture or set the clock on three minutes, or "catch any odd job on the fly," as Trenn used disrespectfully to say in private. Even on this important and exciting occasion, she was not content merely to eat

her supper, listen to Harry's outpouring, and throw in shrewd responses from time to time.

Her handsome features wore that look of animation the spectacle of "getting on" ever inspired in the lady, her eyes glittered like pieces of highly polished, brown onyx, and while she put food into her mouth with the right hand, the left, by a common practice, executed five-finger exercises up and down the cloth, between her plate and the end of the table. But to-night she broke into a fantasia—the pliant little finger curled and tossed its tip in air, playing a soundless pæon to celebrate Harry's entrance into the business of life.

For Mar, in circumstances like these, to hold wide a different door—had there ever been a moment less propitious?

"You ought to have shown me the letter before you sent it off," he said.

"I would, only I knew you 'd think I ought to catch the afternoon mail. There was barely time. And the letter was all right—I 'm sure it was. I told Trenn either he or Siegel had got to pay me from the start. I don't ask much, I said, but I 'm worth something if I *am* a raw hand. I wrote the sort of letter Trenn can show to Siegel. I piled it on about the interruption to my studies, and about father's preferring me to stick at books a year or two more."

"It was ingenious of you to discover that fact," said Mar, quietly.

"Oh, they must n't think I 'm too keen, you know."

Mrs. Mar nodded as she wound up her silent accompaniment with a chord. But if she followed the implied course of reasoning, not so the boy's father.

"If you 've written in that vein," said Mar, slowly, "it seems to me still more premature to have ordered your outfit."

"Oh, that 's all O.K.," said Harry, genially condescending to soothe his father's fears. "Of course I 'm *going*. Trenn 'll understand. He 's got a long head, old Trenn has!"—and he exchanged secure smiles with his mother—"I had to write as I did, don't you see"—again Harry obligingly reduced his tactics to simpler terms to meet the slower comprehension of his father—"just to make Siegel understand he need n't expect to get me for nothing. I 'm not coming in on the 'little brother racket.' No, sir! Old Siegel 's got to pay me something from the start, or how can I be supposed to know it 's a good thing? Siegel's got to *show me!* I 'm from Missouri." He made the boast with his pleasant boyish laugh, pushed back his chair, and walked about, hands in pockets, head in air, describing to his mother how fellows often did better to take their pay in cattle, and little by little get their own herd, and little by little get land. Often they ended by buying out those other fellows who started with capital. She would see! He and Trenn were n't going to take anything on trust. "They 'll find they 've got to *show* us," he said, squaring himself before a lot of imaginary Siegels. "We 're from Missouri!"

Mar, sitting silently by, rose upon that word, and tied up the loose papers that he had laid out on his writing-table. He returned them to the office bag, finding himself arrived at wondering what he had better say if the day ever came when Harry should reproach his father for not telling him about—

But Mar was borrowing trouble.

Trenn had already told him.

And they had laughed together. "Is n't it just *like* him!" Harry had said, and slapped his knee as one who makes a shrewd observation.

After all there was a kind of rough justice in it. It had been Galbraith who had made it possible for Mar to go to Alaska. It was fitting that it should be his son who should share in the benefits.

Mar spent part of the following Saturday afternoon in drafting a letter to the son of his long dead friend. He took uncommon pains with it and he copied it several times. It had no need to be long, for Jack would remember the story. He could not, of course, be expected to interrupt those postgraduate studies, whatever they were precisely—studies which twice already had been dropped, as Mar supposed, while Mr. Jack went cruising about the world in his steam-yacht. But in the nature of things the completion of his preparation for the business of life must be near at hand, for young Galbraith, the most energetic and ambitious of men, was in his twenty-fourth year. Never was such a glutton for work before. Even when he went off pleasuring in his yacht, he went to places not renowned for recreation, and his boon companions were geographers and biologists and such-like gay dogs.

He might, at all events, without prejudice to these final studies, begin to lay plans either for going himself to Alaska presently, or for sending some one else. The best course would be for him to come at once to Valdivia to see his old friend, and to talk things over. Mar thought it advisable to enclose in his letter a sketch of the most interesting section of the Alaskan coast. He could have

drawn it with his eyes shut, now, but he got up, hobbled round the desk, and took down the reconnaissance map from between the pictures of his father and mother. At the same moment, and while he was in the act, Mrs. Mar came in, with that air, especially her own, of one arriving in the nick of time to save the country. Her errand, however, was the one Saturday afternoon invariably brought, the conveying here of the week's mending for Hildegarde's attention; the fastening of the book-rest on the table's edge, the propping up of some volume in the French or German tongue, and the laying ready at one side of a stump of lead-pencil for the marking of pregnant passages. In front of these Mrs. Mar would establish herself in the rocking-chair, with her knitting, or crochet, or some other form of occupation not requiring eyes.

"Hildegarde! Hildegarde!"

"Yes, mama," came in through the open window from the garden.

"I 'm ready!" When was n't Mrs. Mar "ready!" But she announced the fact with a flourish of knitting-needle, as she rocked back and forth and scrutinized her husband. "I 'm glad," she said, briskly, "to see you taking down that old eye-sore." Her eyes pecked at the faded map. "It 's high time it was thrown away."

Her husband paused in his halting progress back to the writing-table. "Time it was thrown away?"

"Yes. Is n't that what you 've got it down for?"

"No."

"What are you going to do with it, then?"

Mar seemed not to hear. He turned his back on the rocking-chair, and propped the map up in front of him,

against the mucilage pot, very much as his wife had propped Eckermann for his regular Saturday conversation with Gœthe.

But Mrs. Mar was never inclined to let her observations go by ignored. "I can hardly suppose you want to have it lumbering up the place here any longer." As still he took no notice, "It certainly is n't decorative." A pause long enough for him to defend it, if he 'd been going to. "Perhaps you 'll tell me what 's the good of keeping it."

"Perhaps you 'll tell me what 's the harm."

She could, easily, but she forbore.

She only agitated the rocking-chair yet more violently, clashed her knitting-needles as she turned the stocking in her quick, competent hands, and with a glance at the clock said briskly, as the door opened: "Come, come, Hildegarde. You 're nearly three minutes behind time."

The girl carried her bowl of roses over to her father's open window, and set it carefully down. Hildegarde was the one person in the world Mrs. Mar never seemed to fluster. As the girl's eye fell on the big envelop addressed in Mar's bold writing, "Oh!" she said, pausing, "have you been hearing again?"

"Hearing what?" came sharply from the swaying figure on the other side of the room.

"You 'll read it to me after we 've done our German, won't you?" whispered the girl, caressingly, as she leaned a moment on the back of Mar's chair.

"Read it to you? Why should I?" he said, nervously, as he laid a piece of blotting-paper over his letter.

"You always do," she pleaded. But if Mr. Mar imagined that his daughter was begging to hear the letter

he himself had just written, Mrs. Mar made no such mistake. She was well aware whose communications had power to stir the "stolid" Hildegarde.

"You never told me," the lady arraigned her husband's back, "that you 'd been hearing again from young Galbraith."

Hildegarde, under the electric shock of the spoken name, seemed to feel called upon to make some show of indifference. She inspected the pile of mending with an air of complete absorption in the extent of the damage. Her mother was saying: "I have n't heard anything about that gentleman"—(oh, wealth of ironic condemnation the accomplished speaker could throw into the innocent words "that gentleman!")—"not since the letter he wrote from the barbarous place you did n't know how to pronounce, and could n't so much as find on the map!"

"Have n't you?" said her husband. "Well, you soon may."

The girl's lowered eyelids fluttered, but the prospect of soon hearing something on this theme left Mrs. Mar collected enough to say: "No earthly use to darn that."

"N-no," agreed the girl.

"Lay a piece under. Match the stripe and cut out the fray. There 's some like it in the ottoman."

Hildegarde went and kneeled down before the big deal "store-box." Its lid, stuffed and neatly covered, made a sightly receptácle for endless oddments.

Mrs. Mar, as she clicked her needles and oscillated her entire frame, kept her eye on the place where she was going to dash into Eckermann the instant Hildergarde was settled to her sewing. But true to the sacred princi-

ple of doing something while she was waiting, Mrs. Mar thus delayed, saw it to be a timely moment to put Jack Galbraith in his proper place. It was not the sort of thing you could do thoroughly once, and be done with. Like house-cleaning, it required to be seen to periodically. "Well, what 's the *epoche-machende* news this time?" As her husband made no haste to answer, "He 's always 'going to break the record,' that young gentleman! I never knew anybody with so many big words in his mouth."

The stricture was deserved enough to gall Jack's friend, who moved uneasily in his revolving chair. But he kept his eyes on the map he was drawing and he kept his lips close shut.

"I see precious little result so far," she was beginning again.

"The result," interrupted Mar, "will be judged when he 's finished his life-work, not while he 's still preparing for it."

"Preparing! Bless me, is n't he old enough to have *done* something, if he was ever going to?"

"If he were going into business, yes. Science is a longer story."

"One excuse is as good as another, I suppose, when a man wants to please himself. It 's like Galbraith to call his fecklessness by a highfalutin name. 'Science,' 'Investigation,' 'Anthropology.' Humph! But it does *sound* better, I agree, than saying he likes satisfying a low curiosity about savages. It is n't even as if he wanted to convert them. Not he! Likes them best as they are: filthy and degraded. 'Philology?' Tomfoolology!"

It was more even than the tranquil Hildegarde could

bear. "Has n't he done something wonderful about ocean currents, papa? Did n't you say that was the real reason why he went that last time to—?"

"Yes. It was a piece of work that brought him recognition very creditable to so young a student."

"*Whose* recognition?" Not hers, the critic of the rocking-chair seemed to say. But Mar took no notice. "And where 's that book he was boasting about six months ago? The one that was going to shed such valuable new light on the—the—Jugginses of No Man's Land. So far as I can see by the feeble light of the female intellect, the Jugginses still sit in the dark. Have n't you found that roll of seersucker yet, Hildegarde? Upon my soul!"—faster flew the needles, harder rocked the chair—"compared with you a snail is a cross between an acrobat and a hurricane."

The girl only laughed. "Here 's the horrid stripey stuff, hiding at the very bottom!" She laid the roll aside, and with a neat precision proceeded to put back all the things she had taken out, for Hildegarde knew, if not properly packed, the ottoman would overflow.

"Now, make haste," urged her mother, "if anything so alien is possible to you. I 'm certainly not going to read to you while you 're fussing about on the other side of the room." Then, not deterred in her unswerving attempt to improve the shining hour, Mrs. Mar flung a quick look at the bent back of her husband, and proceeded to put in the time in clearing up one of his multitudinous misapprehensions.

"What *I* can't forgive Jack Galbraith is his ingratitude to you."

Again Mar moved a little in his creaking chair, but

halted this side speech. Hildegarde, busily repacking, turned her blonde head toward her mother, saying: "Ingratitude! Why, he 's perfectly devoted to papa! That 's why I like Mr. Galbraith."

"Devoted, is he? Well, he 's got odd ways of showing it. When he was a troublesome, inquisitive little pest, he used to reveal his devotion by coming twice every year to turn our house upside down, and get our boys into every conceivable mischief. Glad enough to plant himself here then, when nobody else would be bothered with him. But his devotion to your father does n't carry him the length of coming to see him nowadays. Why, it 's fourteen years since Jack Galbraith darkened these doors, and—"

"Well, I would n't be surprised if he were to darken them very soon," said Mr. Mar.

"What!" said Mrs. Mar, so surprised she allowed the rocking-chair to slow down.

Hildegarde stood transfixed, with the top of the ottoman arrested, half shut.

"Yes," said Mr. Mar, steadily, and in complete good faith, as he slipped the diagram into the envelop. "I 'm expecting him out here this spring."

"Jack is coming!" Hildegarde said to her heart. "Wonderful Jack is coming! Dear Jack! Dear, *dear* Jack! Oh, the beautiful world!"

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Mar, beginning slowly to rock again, "and what 's he coming for *this* time?"

"Perhaps, as Hildegarde is fantastic enough to think, he may be coming to see me," Mar answered.

His wife's laugh had a tang of shrewdness. "You 'll find he has business of some sort to attend to in California, if he *does* come!"

"Just now you were complaining that he did n't attend to business anywhere."

"My complaint—no, my regret—is, that gratitude is n't in the Galbraith blood."

"You have no good reason for saying that." He spoke with uncommon emphasis.

But Mrs. Mar's spirit rose to meet him. "I have the excellent reason that I know enough about the father as well as the son to form an opinion. I don't forget how your 'greatest friend' died, leaving you his executor and leaving you nothing else. Not a penny piece out of all that money."

"I don't see why my friends should leave me money—"

"No, nor why you should get it any other way! Don't let me hurry you, Hildegarde, but if you 've quite finished mooning about in the corner there, I 'd like to mention that it 's exactly twelve and a half minutes since I called you in to your German, and there 's the Missionary Society at half past four, and choir practice at seven, and before we can turn round Mrs. Cox will be here about electing the new secretary to the Shakspere Club, and if I 'd known you were going to squander my time like this I 'd have stopped to make Harry his last Washington pie before—"

"Yes, mama. Now I 'm settled."

Hildegarde took the seat opposite her mother and silently applied the seersucker patch. While Mr. Mar, behind the screen of a much-hunched shoulder, copied with infinite care the "eye-sore" map, Mrs. Mar knitting all the while at lightning speed, rolled out the German uninterruptedly, till a ring at the bell was followed by sounds of Mrs. Cox being shown into the parlor.

Mrs. Mar had known no one so well in Valdivia all these years as Mrs. Elihu Cox. Mrs. Elihu was considered "a very bright woman," and it was no doubt so, since even Mrs. Mar did not demur at her renown. They met seldom, outside of church, the Shakspere Club, or the Mission Society, yet each had admitted things to the other that neither had admitted to any one else. Even to-day, when there was definite business to arrange, they talked of other matters than the vacant secretaryship. They presented each other with views upon domestic service, education, and husbands.

"I left Mr. Cox supremely happy," said his spouse, in that tone of humorous scorn by which many women try to readjust the balance between the sexes. "Yes, supremely happy, clearing out his desk. He does it once a month. Nothing Mr. Cox does brings him so near absolute bliss, except wandering about the place with a hammer and nails."

Both women smiled at the inveterate childishness of the lords of creation.

And then, on a sudden, Mrs. Cox was grave. One might laugh at the odd ways of men with any woman. It is the universal bond that binds the sex together; the fine lady feels it no less when she condoles with her washerwoman upon a stay-at-home husband,—"Yes, yes, a man in the house all day is dreadfully in the way,"—and their identity of sentiment bridges the difference in fortune. But Mrs. Mar was one with whom you might not only laugh over the foibles of the opposite sex, you might even be grave with her on the same ground—a rarer privilege to the educated woman.

"That monthly orgy, that 's such unalloyed delight to

Mr. Cox, used to be a time of great interest to me, too,'' admitted Mrs. Cox.

''Really!'' The president of the Valdivia Shakspere Society could hardly believe it of her friend.

''Yes. You see, there 's always a great clearance made —a general getting rid of all sorts of accumulations. I used to watch every time when he came to the lower left-hand drawer—'' Mrs. Cox smiled faintly as one pitiful of some long-past pain.

''Well, what was the matter with the lower left-hand drawer?''

''That was where he kept a faded photograph of Ellie Brezee. I used to watch to see if *that* time he was going to throw it away. He never did.''

''Who was Ellie Brezee?''

''A sister of Colonel George Brezee—the one that died. That was before you came to California. Mr. Cox was engaged to Ellie when he was nineteen. But, thank goodness, my concern about it is among the things that I 'm done with. I don't any longer sit at home, now, with the tail of my eye on the lower left-hand drawer while Ellie Brezee comes out for her monthly airing.''

''Oh, you disposed of Ellie?''

''No, oh, no.''

''He finally threw the picture away himself?''

''No. Only now, I know he never will.''

They were silent a moment. ''I never *said* anything, of course; and he never made any secret about it. I did n't think it any disloyalty to me that he should keep it. At the same time''—she dropped her voice—''the pain the sight of that faded face was to me for years—you think it supremely silly, I suppose. But then *your*

husband does n't hoard up the memory of some girl that 's been dead and buried for twenty years, so you can't understand.''

''Yes, I can understand,'' Mrs. Mar answered, with an eye that saw through the wall the reconnaissance map of Norton Sound.

CHAPTER V

JACK GALBRAITH replied to Mr. Mar's letter by return of post. He apologized for not writing more at length, but he was up to his eyes in proof-correcting. He was seeing through the press—"Yes, yes, but all that was singularly irrelevant")—book about his experiences ("Hum! hum!"), "extreme northern Siberia." ("*Siberia,* forsooth!"); no white man had ever been there before. ("And to think he *might* have spent that time in Alaska!") He was "making a genuine contribution to science"—oh, yes, quite so—"most travelers too imperfectly equipped." ("He could n't have had my letter when he wrote this.") The implication was, of course, that Galbraith's own equipment left nothing to be desired. He even touched airily upon his claims to be considered geographer as well as navigator, electrician, geologist, philologist, biologist, and the Lord knows what, beside. Yes, Jack had a large way of envisaging human endeavor, especially his own. But certainly their letters had crossed. Hum! he had "covered areas in science never before exploited by a single man." The result Mar should presently see. For Galbraith would leave word that a copy of the great work should be sent to his old friend. It would be two years before he himself could

see the thing in book form. ("What 's this?") "Off again, to join an expedition!" And was n't it strange? He was going to the arctic as Mar was recommending. Not precisely to Norton Bay, but ("Then he *had* got the letter!") "with the Swedish explorer Nordenskjöld to see if by good luck" they could find the North Pole. And why should n't they "come home via Norton Bay?" he asked, with irresponsible arrogance, adding, characteristically: "I 'll mention it to the Swede. Perhaps we 'll crawl over the crown of the world and coast down the shore of Alaska till we come up against your Anvil Rock. If we do, I promise to go and see after the gold-mine for you. Thank you for saying I 'm to have my share—but thank you most of all for telling me such a mighty fine story when I was a kid. It had a great deal to do with the shaping of my ambition, and the direction of my multifarious studies."

And this was Galbraith's good-by.

These events had taken place nearly two years before Bella Wayne began her meteoric career at the Valdivia School for Young Ladies.

If Hildegarde had recovered somewhat from her disappointment at Jack's failure to visit California, her father had not ceased silently to lament, and secretly to contemn Galbraith's wounding flippancy in his choice of a route to Alaska.

When Madeleine Smulsky's family took her away to live in Wyoming, Hildegarde would have been even more desolate but for her espousal of Bella Wayne's cause, and consequent preoccupation with that not altogether satisfactory protégée.

For Miss Bella had "ways" that were distinctly rasping. She was abominably selfish, and her big family of brothers and sisters had spoiled her from the day she could toddle.

She was, besides, the uncomfortable kind of little girl in whose eyes you always saw reflected whatever was amiss with you. You might have on a hat of ravishing beauty, but if your belt had worked up and your skirt had worked down, Bella's glance ignored your highly satisfactory top and fastened on your middle. Not until after she had known Bella Wayne for some months did Hildegarde begin to divine her own shortcomings in the matter of dress. No gulf of years, or respect for high standing in the school, deterred Bella from letting Miss Mar know that she could never, never wear with success a checked shirt-waist. Why not? Because. And for the same excellent reason, Miss Mar must have her things made plainer. No puffing; no shirring. "*I* can wear 'fluffery,' but you can't. You 're much too like an old goddess or Boadicea, or some whacking person like that," which was tepid and discreet in comparison with many of her deliverances. She would ask you a highly inconvenient question as soon as wink, and her own frankness was a thing to make you cold down your back. An eye that nothing escaped, the keenest of little noses for a secret, a ruthless finger for any sensitive spot—that was Bella Wayne at twelve. It was the second time that she was being so kindly helped by Miss Hildegarde, and yet more than at the reduction of "those disgusting fractions" Bella looked at her new friend, bent so low over the slate that her sole ornament, a silver locket, swung against the dado of dragons, without whose scaly support

Bella could never hope to bring her mind down to mathematics for a moment. She reflected that she had never seen Miss Mar without that locket. Was there anything inside it? Her fingers itched to open it and see. It was suspended round the smooth neck on a narrow velvet ribbon. Bella, supposed to be following the course of reasoning by which it was to be demonstrated that "since 100 pounds of coal cost $0.33 per hundredweight, 385 pounds (which are equal to 3.85 times 100 pounds) will cost 3.85 times $0.33," she was in reality making mental calculation of a quite different character, as she studied the little black velvet bowknot that rested on the milk-white nape of Miss Mar's neck, just underneath a flaxen ring of hair. One end of the bow was longer than the other.

"Five times three are fifteen. Five and carry one—see, Bella?"

"Yes." What Bella saw, with that look of luminous intelligence, was that the silver locket was sliding into Miss Mar's lap.

"Eight times three—oh!" But before Hildegarde could close her fingers on the fallen trinket, Bella had snatched it up and carried it away behind the syringas.

"Give me back my locket!" called Hildegarde. "Give it back this minute!"

Bella made off to a remoter fastness. Hildegarde pursued her. But Hildegarde never could catch anybody, and Bella was already the champion runner of the school. "Bella, I never show that to anybody. I won't forgive you if you open it."

"Oh, I *must* see why you say that!" Bella stopped and tried the fastening. Hildegarde rushed at her, but

Bella fled at each approach. At last the big girl stopped breathless, and tried moral suasion. The little girl only laughed, and standing just out of reach had the effrontery to open the locket and make unseemly comment upon what she found within.

"My gracious! *Is n't* he a sweet? Where does he live? Does he go to church? I 'm sure *I 've* never seen this bee-yew-tiful young man before. Girls, do you want to look at Miss Mar's sweetheart. Come and see this darling duck!" She summoned the laughing group that had been looking on.

But Bella only pretended to show them. Every time anybody came near, she covered the face with her thumb. But Hildegarde, lacking the small satisfaction of knowing that, worn out with the race and scarlet with indignation, breathless, outraged, pursued the fleet little villain from group to group, and after the bell rang, from garden to hall. In vain.

When Bella appeared at the breaking up of school that day, and restored the locket, Miss Mar received it in a lofty silence, refusing even to look at a little girl so ill-mannered and ungrateful.

But the next day Bella, much subdued by one of her recurrent attacks of homesickness, red-eyed, a little pinched-looking and woebegone, begged pardon so prettily, that Miss Mar's heart was melted.

"And I did n't really show it to the others. Ask anybody. I would n't do *that*. Oh, no!" And then betraying the true ground of this pious self-control, "Is it your brother?"

"No." Hildegarde bent her head over the slate.

"Who is it?"

"A friend of my father's."

"Do you love him dreadfully?"

"Of *course* not. I never saw him."

"What makes you wear his picture?"

"I only put it in the locket because I had n't anything else the right size. That 's all."

"Then why did you make such a fuss when I—"

"Because I thought it very rude of you to look into somebody else's locket without permission. And it *might* have been something that mattered."

There was that in the unconverted look on the little face which made Hildegarde hot to her ear-tips.

But Bella said not a word, only smiled with that returning interest in life that so readily revives in the breast of the shrewd observer. And without a "please" or a "will you?" Bella handed the big girl her slate, with its two days' accumulation of fractions and of dragons. Hildegarde's sensibilities were once more so outraged that for a moment she hesitated to accept the task so coolly put upon her.

"I believe you 're a little monster," said Miss Mar, in her slow way. "I don't see why I should trouble myself about you or your arithmetic."

"I know why," returned Bella, unmoved.

"Why?"

"Because you 're the nicest of all the big girls."

Hildegarde tried to conceal the fact that she was somewhat softened by this tribute. "I 'm not really the nicest," she said, trying to be modest.

"Well, perhaps you 're not the nicest, but you 've got the longest eyelashes. It 's a good thing they are n't as light as your hair, is n't it?"

"Well, I don't know. Fives into—"

"Yes, you do, you know you 'd cry your eyes out if your winkers were as nearly white as your hair is. What do you do to make your eyelashes so long?"

"Nothing. Now pay attention. You reduce thirty-three and a third to thirds and—"

"Did your mother keep them cut when you were a baby?"

"No, silly."

"I believe she did." The next day Miss Bella appeared without eyelashes. Every individual hair snipped close to the lid.

"I mean to have mine just like Miss Mar's," she told the group gathered about Hildegarde's desk. "Hers are so immense they *trail.* I 'm sure they must get awfully in the way sometimes."

"Then I wonder you run such a risk. You 'd better have left yours as they were."

"Oh, if mine grow out as long as that, of course I shall plait them and tie them up with blue ribbons."

But it was not always admiration to which she treated her patron.

She was once twitted quite groundlessly with feeling herself obliged to "mind" Miss Mar.

"Yes," she said, laughing a little wickedly. "I *must,* you see. She 's so massive. Just look at her shoulders. Look at her hips. Even her hair is massive. See what wobs it goes into." This conversation took place in the cloak-room. "Everything about her is so big, it scares a little person like me. Look at that hat. You 'd know it must belong to Miss Mar. If it was anybody else's it would be a parasol. But you can tell it 's a hat because

it 's got an elastic instead of a stick. And just look at the size of that elastic. Why, it 's as broad as my garter."

Now and then she would startle Hildegarde's self-possession by an outburst of torrential affection. And so it came about that in spite of Bella's blithe impertinence, Hildegarde even in those early days thought of her with sympathy as a lonely little being who was in reality very grateful for a big girl's friendship. She would follow at Hildegarde's heels like a pet dog, walk with her down to the gate every day after school, and invent one ingenious pretext after another to keep Hildegarde standing there a moment longer. Sometimes, when at last she said "good-by," there was not regret alone but tears as well in Bella's pretty eyes.

"It must have been a little girl at boarding-school that found out Friday was an unlucky day," she announced on one occasion. "It 's the miserablest, blackest day of the week. Yes it is, Miss Mar. It 's just hellish."

"Why, Bella Wayne! What *awful* language."

"Well, you have to get hold of awful language when you 're thinking of an awful thing. All to-night, and all to-morrow, and all to-morrow night, and all Sunday, and all Sunday night, to live through before I see you again!" The small face worked with suppressed emotion, the small mind with suppressed arithmetic. Both eventually found outward expression. "Sixty-six hours!" she said, while two tears rolled out of her eyes. "Sixty-six hours till you 're back here again. I don't honestly think I can bear it this time. I shall die. I know I shall. I feel very strange already. Would you care if I died? W-would you come to the funeral?"

She choked. "W-what would you wear? You 'd look p-perfectly bee-yew-tiful in black. *Do* wear black. Oh, I *wish* I was dead. It would be so nice to see how you look in black."

Hildegarde was touched to find how wildly delighted the homesick little girl was at the idea of being invited to spend Saturday afternoon at the Mars—a little anxious, too, was Miss Mar, lest the occasion should not come up to such ecstatic expectation. Not that the Mar house was at all the forlorn and dingy place it had been in the days when Mrs. Mar struggled alone, with a scant income and three babies. The general impression was that the Mar boys already contributed generously to the family resources. But the fact was that their mother was ingeniously making the very most of what "the boys" added to the common purse. The amount was as yet quite trifling—"of necessity," she would have added, for they were both young men who looked ahead. But it was really to Hildegarde that the little house owed its air of immaculate freshness and good taste. If she could n't play or sing, she could paint—bookshelves, the floors, even the woodwork. Several years ago she proved that she could paper a room. She managed to cover the old furniture with charming chintz "for a song," and she made curtains out of nothing at all. No one could arrange flowers better or grow them half so well. When she was given money for her clothes, she often spent it on something for the house. Not fully realizing her genius for domestic affairs, she told herself the reason she did all this was to make the house pretty "for when Jack comes back." He might arrive quite suddenly. He did everything without warning. I may come home from school

any day to find him here! Oh, it lent a wonderful zest to life to remember that.

Bella was pleased to like Miss Mar's garden immensely, but even more she liked Miss Mar's room, with its white curtains and dimity-covered toilet-table, and the scant and simple furniture that looked so nice and fresh since Hildegarde had herself enameled it. When the little visitor looked round with that quick-glancing admiration and said: "Oh, it 's much prettier than mine at home."

"What 's yours like?" asked Miss Mar, politely.

"Oh, it 's all pink silk, and I 'm sick of it. What made you think of having everything white?"

"This, I believe," said her hostess, nodding at the climbing white rose that looked in at the window. "But it 's partly that I like things that wash and that don't fade."

"Well, I simply love your house. I 'd no *idea* it would be like this."

"Why, what did you think it would be like?"

"Oh—a—kind of—no, I shan't say. You 'd misunderstand."

Hildegarde felt it prudent not to insist. If you did, with this young person, you were exposed to the most mortifying results.

"Who are these?" Bella demanded, inspecting the pictures.

"My brothers. That 's Trenn and this is Harry."

"Will they be at tea?"

"No, they 're on a ranch in Tulare County."

"Why, *we 've* got a ranch in Tulare County." She was still looking round as if expecting to find something

that as yet escaped her eye. "Where 's—where—a—Show me your—your ribbons and things."

"I have n't got any. We can't afford ribbons in this family."

"Let me see your collars and ties, then." Hildegarde opened her top drawer. In the course of turning over collars and handkerchiefs and little boxes the silver locket came to light.

"Why don't you wear it any more?"

"Oh, I don't know."

Bella leaned her head with its halo of short, brown curls against her friend, and very softly she beguiled her: "Please, Miss Mar, show me that friend of your father's again."

Hildegarde hesitated a moment and then she opened the locket. Jack Galbraith's face smiled out upon the big girl and the little girl.

"Did you say you had n't ever seen him?"

"No, he has n't been here for sixteen years. Not since he was a little boy. And he might have been here always, because he was an orphan and his father was my father's greatest friend. But some relations of his that nobody had ever heard of before, they discovered him when he was nine, and made him come to New York and live with them. But he did n't like it. At least—*I* don't know—mother thinks *they* did n't like it."

"Why does she think that?"

"Because they let him go away to school. And he spent his vacations canoeing, climbing mountains, and doing all sorts of queer things rather than live with his relations. Then he went to Harvard, and then he went abroad and studied. He 's always studying."

"Gracious! what makes him do that?"

"Oh, he wants to find out about everything. And he 's doing it. He 's written a book with things in it nobody ever heard of before. Father says it 's a work of genius. Mr. Galbraith was coming here two years ago, when he 'd finished the book, only just then—"

"I did n't think," Bella interrupted with a sigh, "I did n't think from his picture he was so awful old."

"He is n't. He 's barely twenty-five."

But Bella shook her head. "If a person 's over twenty he might just as well be a hundred."

"Yes, ordinary people. But it does n't matter *how* old a genius is. Father 's awfully excited about Mr. Galbraith just now, for he 's been away a year and a half on an arctic expedition and we 're expecting him back next summer. We may be hearing from him any day after the middle of June. Father and I often talk about it when we 're alone together."

"Why don't you talk about it when there 's anybody there?"

"Oh, mother 's always so down on Mr. Galbraith."

"What 's she down on him for?"

"Just because he wants to discover the North Pole."

"Well, don't you think yourself that 's rather—"

"No, I don't."

"To be wasting two whole years in just hunting round for the Pole? What 's the good of the Pole, anyway?"

Hildegarde smiled a smile of superiority.

"My geography"—Bella invoked authority that even a big girl must respect—"my geography says—"

"You 're too young to understand. It 's not the Pole. It 's the glory."

"What glory?"

"Nobody 's ever yet got there."

"Why should anybody? Lots of nicer places."

"A great many people have tried. A good many have died trying—"

"Well, that 's a good reason for not bothering about it any more."

"Oh, you 're just like—" But filial respect restrained Miss Mar. "I agree with Mr. Galbraith. He thinks there 's nothing in the world half so interesting to do."

"He *must* be silly."

"No, he is n't! He 's splendid—" But Hildegarde snapped the locket to, and hid it under her best handkerchiefs.

The following Saturday, when Bella asked again to see the locket, Miss Mar declined to bring it out. Bella begged in vain. She discovered that her big, gentle friend could be immovable.

To Hildegarde's dismay, Bella presently dissolved in tears. "Then may I s-see the work of g-genius?"

"Yes, you may look at his book all you like." She even let Bella take it away with her to tide her over Sunday. But Mr. Galbraith's "Winter among the Samoyedes" had small success with Miss Wayne. "They make me sick, those people! I can't think how anybody likes hearing about their dirty ways," and she even cast reflections on Jack for wasting his time over such "horrors." However, there was another side to it. "What a relief it 'll be to him to be with *us* after the Samoyedes!"

"With *us!*" Hildegarde smiled inwardly.

Sitting by the rose-framed window one Saturday

afternoon, talking as usual about Mr. Galbraith and how soon he might be expected back from the Pole, Bella suddenly burst out: "I 'm tired to death of saying 'Miss Mar.' I *do* wish you 'd let me call you 'Hildegarde.' "

The big girl's breath was taken away. For the gulf between twelve and sixteen is a thing hardly passable in that stronghold of class distinction, a girls' school. It was rare, indeed, that one of Miss Mar's ripe age stooped to help a little girl over a difficulty in her lessons. It required something of the missionary spirit to take such pity upon homesickness, as occasionally to give the afflicted one the great treat of visiting a big girl on Saturday afternoon—but really to go to the length proposed—

"I shan't believe you really love me," the little girl rushed on, "unless you say yes. Oh, do say yes. *Everything* depends on it. I 'll promise always to say 'Miss Mar' before people. But if you 'll let me call you Hildegarde when we 're alone, I 'll *know* you 're my best friend. And then I 'll tell you a secret. I 'll tell you two. *Tremendous* secrets!"

It was finally arranged.

"Now for the tremendous secrets," said Hildegarde, smiling.

But Bella was portentously grave, even agitated. "Well," she said, bracing herself, "my father 's an Englishman. Don't tell anybody. Cross your heart and hope you may die if ever you tell the girls."

"All right. Cross my heart and hope I may die. But how in the world—?"

"It is n't my fault, you see. And *I 'm* an American all right. I 've always wanted to explain to you ever

since you were so angelic about my fractions; it 's because my father 's an Englishman I have to eat milk pudding. Over there''— Bella flicked a small hand across the American continent and over the Atlantic deep, to indicate an inconsiderable island where the natives persist in strange customs—''over there they all do it. Of course, the minute I 'm of age I shall insist on pie.'' They discussed the matter in all its bearings.

''Now about the other secret.''

''Well''—even the daring Bella caught her breath and paused. ''No, not to-day. I 'll keep the tremendousest one for another time. But *do* get out the silver locket, *dear* Hildegarde, and let 's look at it.''

Ultimately she prevailed. The next time Bella came she found a delightful surprise. The low table was cleared of everything but bowls of roses; and against the white wall great ferns printed plain their tall and splendid plumes—leaving free a little space in the middle where, on a gilt nail, hung the open locket.

Bella was delighted with the whole scheme. ''It only wants one thing to make it perfect. No, I won't tell you what it is. I 'll bring it next Saturday.''

''It'' proved to be a paper of Chinese joss-sticks, and a little bronze perforated holder. ''We must each burn one to him every week,'' she said, setting up her contribution below the dangling locket.

''I don't quite know if we ought,'' Hildegarde said. ''Joss-sticks are prayers you know—at least the Chinese think so.''

''Well, of course they 're prayers. That 's why I brought them.''

While the two joss-sticks sent up into the rose-per-

fumed air faint spirals of an alien fragrance, the two girls sat in front of the confident young face looking out of the silver locket, and talked endlessly about the owner.

Hildegarde found it subtly intoxicating to have so keen an auditor—a sharer even (to the humble extent possible for extreme youth) in the great pivotal romance of existence.

And then Bella had such wonderful inspirations. It was she who saw the larger fitness in Mr. Mar's habit of going fishing on Saturday afternoons. What was that but an arrangement of the gods that he should be so effectually out of the way, that Hildegarde might with safety borrow from his desk the Galbraith letters. Sitting close together on a square of Japanese matting, in front of the rose table, an anxious ear listening for Mrs. Mar's return from the missionary meeting, the dark head leaned against the fair, while the two girls read and re-read those precious documents, in an atmosphere charged with incense and a palpitating joy. One day, arrived regretfully at the end of the letter they liked best, Bella bent and kissed the signature. Hildegarde's heart gave a great jump. The daring of that deed was well-nigh impious. Hildegarde, when all by herself, had done the same, but that was different.

"Now you know my other secret," said Bella, very pink—"the tremendousest one of all." When the first shock had died away, Hildegarde was left with a pitiful tenderness before the disarming frankness of such a confession. Poor little Bella! Why, Jack did n't even know of her existence. He never would, till in some rare idle hour of the glorious future, Hildegarde should tell him of a little homesick girl she had befriended once at school.

But Bella could be depended on to break in upon such gracious forecasting of the future, with a suddenness that made the picture dance, "Which of us two do you suppose Jack 'll fall in love with?"

Hildegarde, almost paralyzed by the presumption this implied, barely managed to bring out, "You 're much too little to think of—"

"I shan't be little always."

"You 'll always be more than twelve years younger than Mr. Galbraith." Hildegarde always said Mr. Galbraith when she wanted to keep the intruder at a distance.

But Bella advanced as bold as brass. "*Anyhow* I think he 'll fall in love with me."

"Of course a person so modest would be likely to appeal to any gentleman."

"No, it 's not my being modest he 'll mind about. It 's other things."

"What other things?"

"Well—you—of course you 've got your eyelashes, and you 're in the full bloom of womanhood. But *I 'm* in the first blush of youth. I think he 'll like that best."

It was the second Saturday in June, and school was breaking up next week. Mrs. Mar had finished off the Braut von Messina in the dining-room, and barely begun with the Hindu Mission on the other side of the city. Hildegarde had retired to her room to watch, not for Bella's coming (the window did not command the front), but for Mr. Mar's going down the garden with rod and creel. What made him so dilatory to-day? While Hildegarde wondered, Bella came flying in, shut the door with agitated care, faced about with cheeks of crimson,

"The two girls sat in front of the confident young face looking out of the silver locket"

hat over one ear and the whisper, "Hildegarde, I 've seen him! I 've seen him! Oh, Hildegarde, he 's here!" Wherewith she precipitated herself upon her friend's neck and hugged her breathlessly.

"Who, who?"

"Why, 'he.' *He 's* here! The only man I ever loved!"

Hildegarde took the dancing dervish by the shoulders. "You don't mean—"

"Yes, yes, I do. He came in just before me. He 's perfectly glorious. Just to look at him makes you feel—makes you think you 've got windmills shut up inside you. Everything goes whirling round. And when he asked" (Bella lowered her pipe to a masculine depth): " 'Is Mr. Mar at home?' it sounded so beautiful, I thought for a moment he was talking poetry. Oh, Hildegarde! *Hildegarde!*" Again she sunk her ecstacy to whispering as she followed her friend out into the hall. Together they hung over the banisters. The visitor was talking more poetry apparently in the dining-room. The two girls stayed suspended there an eternity. At last with thumping hearts, upon Bella's suggestion, they went down into the entry. "We 'll pretend to be putting on our overshoes. I 'll have Mrs. Mar's!" whispered Bella, excitedly, ignoring the fact that the continued fine weather and dusty streets lent an air of eccentricity to the proceeding. She stopped after drawing on one big overshoe and shuffled softly to the dining-room door. She put her eye to the keyhole. No use. Notwithstanding Hildegarde's whispered remonstrance, she glued her ear to the aperture. The door was suddenly opened and Miss Bella fell sideways into the arms of an astonished young man, who said: "Hello, what 's this?" Hildegarde,

drowned in sympathetic confusion, helped Bella to regain her equilibrium, while she muttered the explanation "Overshoes!"

"This is my daughter Hildegarde, Mr. Cheviot," said Mr. Mar, "and this is our little friend, Bella Wayne."

"*Ch-Cheviot!*" stuttered the little friend.

The young man with the laughing eyes said: "Anything wrong with the name?" and having shaken hands with "my daughter Hildegarde," he departed.

"Did you say his name was Cheviot?" Hildegarde asked her father.

"Yes. The new recruit at the bank. Seems to be an intelligent sort of fellow."

With ease and celerity Miss Bella transferred her affections from a faded photograph, a packet of letters, and a book of travels, to a real live young man with a square jaw that looked as if he meant business, but with a ready laugh, too, as if the business were not without its diverting aspect. Then he had rough brown hair that "fitted" him. Bella would have told you this was a rarity, most people's beginning too far back from the forehead, or growing too much away from the ears, leaving them with a bare and naked look. Or it grew in a peak. Or it did n't grow low enough on the neck and was like a badly made wig, that had slipped forward. Or worse than anything, it forgot where to stop and grew down into the collar like Professor Altberg's, prompting the irreverent Bella to whisper to her neighbor (while the grave instructor was sitting with head bent over a Latin

exercise): "How far do you think it goes? Do you suppose he 's hairy *all* down his back?"

However that might be, Cheviot's hair fitted him. Moreover, he had, in Bella's estimation, a fascinating, if somewhat mocking air toward little girls, and he helped one little girl gallantly through the dismal Sundays by the simple process of sitting in church where she could watch him. Once in a while in coming out, Bella would catch his eye, and he would laugh and give her a nod. On the rare occasions of his encountering Miss Bella at the Mars', he never failed to stop and mimic her first greeting, "I 'm 'Ch-Cheviot,' you know. Now what 's the matter with that name?" which was vastly entertaining, not to say "taking."

John Galbraith came back to America that autumn, but he stayed in the East.

Bella did n't much care what he did now, for she was thirteen, and in spite of the ugliness of their Hindu protégée Miss Wayne had joined the Busy Bees. That was because Hildegarde had told her that Louis Cheviot went to their dances. Bella saw at once the fitness of her doing the same. The result was that she seldom waltzed less than twice with the new hero, who, it must be admitted, was a better batsman than dancer. But nobody could help "getting through" with Bella as a partner, for she danced divinely. Cheviot should have been better pleased to get her for his partner, but it was plain that he was unduly preoccupied about "my daughter Hildegarde." Several of the young men were. Bella told herself with a consciousness of native worth, that she had

never minded in the least before. But this was different. She made up her mind that if "Ch-Cheviot" goaded her much further by this display of misplaced devotion, she would just take the misguided young man aside some day and talk to him "as a friend."

She would tell him about Jack Galbraith.

CHAPTER VI

BELLA WAYNE'S father had been in the royal navy. His health had given way about the same time as his patience on the vexed question of non-promotion. He retired from the service, went with his American wife and family to California on a visit, became enamoured of the climate, bought a place, and settled there. The three youngest of his seven children were born in Tulare County, but for him "home" was still England, however ungrateful. They all went back every second year to visit his father in Staffordshire, and when Bella's two sisters found English husbands, there were three reasons for the recurrent visit to the old country. The eldest son, Tom Wayne, had made a fortune on the New York Stock Exchange and married a girl belonging to one of the old Knickerbocker families. Tom's country house on Staten Island proved highly convenient as a half-way station between England and California. Mrs. Tom was a very charming person, and a certain portion of Bella's satisfaction in going abroad lay in the chance it presented of making a visit to Staten Island, on the way over and back. Nevertheless, as she never failed to tell Hildegarde on her return, there was no place to be compared to California, no friend and no "in-law" who could make up to her for being away from

Hildegarde, and she might have added, from the neighborhood of that obdurate creature with the cold blue eyes and the colder heart, Louis Cheviot. Those who thought about it at all were surprised that the friendship of the two girls was not more interrupted upon Hildegarde's graduating from the school, when Bella was less than fifteen. But not upon community of tasks, rather upon something essential in the nature of each had their alliance been founded—kept vital by wants in each that the other could supply, excesses in each that the other helped to modify. They themselves thought their relation had its deeper roots in a conviction of the peculiar sanctity of girls' friendships; a creed to which Hildegarde's fidelity effected Miss Bella's actual adhesion only by degrees and with notable backslidings.

But even in early days, Bella felt it was highly distinguished to stand in this relation to one who thought and talked about it as Hildegarde did. Had n't she said in that soft, deliberate way of hers, that it was capable of being one of the most beautiful things in all the beautiful world? It was something, she said, no man knew anything about. Why, they presumed to doubt its possibility even! Ah, they should have known Hildegarde Mar and Bella Wayne. Men believed that all girls were, at heart, jealous of all other girls. They thought meanly of the sex. They pointed to David and Jonathan, to Orestes and Pylades, to instances innumerable of men's faithfulness to men. But what bard or legend celebrates woman's friendship as toward woman? Well, you see, all the chroniclers since the beginning of the world have been of the scoffer's sex. That was why women's friendships had never been celebrated—though men said the

real reason was—oh, they spoke blasphemies!—and they had n't known Hildegarde and Bella. It was Hildegarde's theme, but Bella agreed to every word. Yes, yes, *their* friendship would show the world!

For qualities alien to her own, Hildegarde came to look upon her little friend with an adoring admiration. Bella's wit and Bella's originality, Bella's entire "mode of being," were at once tonic and delight. Then, too, behind her provoking charm was a finished daintiness, which with her became elevated into a special quality, distinctive, all-pervading, a certain strangeness of fragility—a physical fineness like the peculiar fineness of a flower—a something suggesting evanescence, and having the subtle pathos of the thing that may not, cannot bide.

It would have been hard to say which was of most use to the other in making clearer the riddle of life, or more radiant the beauty of the world, or more wonder-waking, the mystery of a young girl's heart. They read, and walked, and talked, and worked, together, paying their vaunted friendship a finer tribute than words, however honestly uttered; for they grew in each other's company.

The younger, too, was cured of certain of her more inadmissible "ways," while the elder learned from Butterfly Bella many a thing besides the art of making the most of her beauty.

Not that Hildegarde despised this last. She had none of the comfort of knowing it was part of her largeness of nature, that she should take more easily to beautifying her home than to making the best of herself. Indeed to the end of time, she required guidance in matters of dress. And who so well qualified as Miss Bella to give

advice. She went further: with her own ingenious little hands she made the most becoming of "shirt-waists," trimmed heavenly hats, and firmly forbade fripperies.

"No, no, they 're not for the massive." She applauded her friend for not wearing trinkets—she did n't like to see her even with her maternal grandmother's emerald brooch. "No, I don't like you in 'didoes' of any sort. They 're too insignificant for you. You ought to wear ropes of pearls, or a tiara of diamonds, or better still, something barbaric—what 's one little lady-like emerald set in a filigree of diamond chips? Why, it can't even be seen—on you. Of course the emerald 's a pretty little stone, and the old setting 's nice. It would shine out on me, but—well, it 's simply *lost,* you know, on your heroic neck."

Hildegarde deplored her size, she carried it even with a sense of humiliation just as she bore with her lack of elegant accomplishments. It was pretty terrible to have to put up with being such a great lump—especially with the ethereal Bella always by to point the advantage of the opposite. Still, there was no blinking the facts. "You 're right, I believe, didoes of any sort *are* rather wasted on me," Hildegarde would say meekly, "I must have felt that when I hardly ever wore them—though I liked them. It takes you, Bella, to explain things."

Nothing was ever allowed to come in the way of their spending their Saturday afternoons together, and if, as time went on, less was heard about Jack from Hildegarde, it was only because so very much more was heard about Cheviot from Bella.

It was a difficult moment when two girls with such lofty ideas of friendship met for the first time after Che-

viot had said to Hildegarde at a dance: "When are you going to begin to care for me?" She had been so taken by surprise that she had only smiled and said: "I don't know," but she thought hardly less of Bella at the moment than she thought of Jack. So the next time that Bella remarked by the way: "Is n't he perfectly fascinating?" Hildegarde had hesitated, and she—yes—she was actually getting red. Bella stared, "Why, are *you* coming to—to—"

"No; *oh,* no! Only—"

"Only what?"

"It 's dreadfully hard, but I have n't forgotten our compact. So I suppose I 've got to tell you what—what he said to me last night."

Bella received the information with a half-hysterical pretense of carrying it off gaily. "Well, what 's there new in that? As if every soul in Valdivia has n't known for perfect ages that he cares about you frightfully. I don't mind *you.* Because you 're Hildegarde, and any man who did n't love you must—well, there must be something pretty wrong about him. I shall give him a whole year—maybe even two, to go on like that, and then when I 'm sixteen, or seventeen at the latest, I won't have it any longer."

Hildegarde, enormously relieved, laughed and kissed her. "Oh, you nice, funny child!"

"Only promise me again, cross your heart and hope you may die, if you ever keep anything from me about Louis Cheviot."

Hildegarde complied and life went on as before—only that Hildegarde showed herself less ready to fall in with Bella's ecstasies. An instinct to forestall a possible

jealousy made her cavil from time to time. "Don't you think his shoulders are too broad for his height?"

"No, I don't, and look how splendidly he carries them. You have to see him beside a huge man, like Mr. Mar, before you realize—"

"Yes, yes; *that 's* true," Hildegarde hastened to heal the wound.

"And, anyhow, I don't think it 's kind of you to run Louis down. I am always very nice about Jack."

The end of it was that Cheviot came more and more to the Mar house, and seemed so diverted when he found the lively Bella there, that Hildegarde gave herself up without reserve to the three-cornered friendship.

He took the girls boating and organized parties to the Tule Lands, and was altogether a most invaluable ally in the agreeable pursuit of being a young lady in her first season.

Still, when Bella praised him absolutely without moderation, "Y-yes," Hildegarde would respond, "he is *nice*, only—"

"Only what?" says Miss Bella, instantly on the defensive.

"Well, you know I prefer big men."

"Of course you do. It 's being so massive yourself. But he 's exactly the right size for me."

"Oh, yes, and he 's quite the nicest of all the Valdivia boys."

"Well, that 's going pretty far," says Bella, with an edge in her voice.

Then the other, with that recurrent though only half-conscious need to show that after all, she, Hildegarde, was n't dazzled—not being in Bella's state, *she* could see

blemishes—the older girl would add: "And yet somehow for all his niceness, and making us always have a good time when he 's there, to my thinking there 's something terribly unromantic about Louis Cheviot."

"Now you only say that," retorts Miss Bella, with sparkling eyes, "because he 's in a bank."

"No—no," vaguely, "but I don't believe he 's got any soul."

"Just because he is n't hunting the North Pole!"

"No. That is n't the reason. I assure you it is n't."

"Then it *can* only be because he likes to laugh at everything."

"He *is* pretty frivolous," said Hildegarde, "and he ridicules friendship. But no, it 's not that, either. It 's because he 's kind of chilling. To *me.*"

"Chilling to you?" Bella beamed. "Oh, do tell me about that."

"Sometimes he 's positively rude."

"To *you?*" Bella could have danced.

"To anybody."

"Oh, but *when* was he positively rude to you? How black-hearted of you, Hildegarde, not to tell me that before! You might have known I 'd simply *love* hearing about that."

Hildegarde laughed. "Why, I have n't seen you since Thursday."

"Was it at your birthday party?"

"Yes, at the birthday party."

"Well, well, how did he do it? What did he say?"

"It was after we 'd all been reading the poem that came with Eddie Cox's present. Louis made fun of it."

"That was only being rude to Eddie." Bella's face fell.

"Wait till you hear. I defended it, of course, and said: 'It is n't as easy as it looks to make birthday odes.' 'It certainly does n't *look* difficult—to make *that* kind,' he said. 'Then why,' I said, just to stand up for Eddie, 'why have you never written a poem about my airy tread?' And Louis said: 'Well, there may be another reason, but no girl who stands five foot ten in her stockings and weighs a hundred and fifty pounds need ask it.' *That 's* the kind of thing."

It was an incident Miss Bella loved to recall. No man could be really in love with a girl he had said *that* to.

But some months later, Hildegarde was obliged, according to the code. to report that Cheviot had been "going on" again.

Bella insisted on having all the "horrid details."

"It was last night at the taffy pulling. You know how we 'd all been laughing at his stories of Miss Monk meeting the Carters' black cow—"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, I was laughing so I could n't stop, and it was so warm in that room the candy was melting. You remember he said—"

"Oh, yes," said Bella, with feeling, "*I* remember. He said you must come and pull with him."

"—out in the porch where the candy and I would cool off."

"And you went."

"And he made more jokes on the way out. I begged him not to talk any more, for I 'd got into a silly mood and everything he said made me laugh. 'I know, I know,' he said. 'I labor under the fatal disadvantage of the funny man, but I could make you serious you know.'

And then—then—he had the impertinence—to kiss me."

"Oh, Hildegarde!"

"Yes. It was dreadfully grotesque, too—our hands were stuck together by that great yellow rope of taffy, and I could only stammer and get redder. But I did say I was not going to forgive him. Nobody had ever been so rude to me before. Then he got awfully serious and said all kinds of things—"

"*What* kind?"

"And at last he asked me what was wrong with Ch-Cheviot—your old joke, you know."

Bella clenched her hands. Sacrilege! to present *her* joke to another girl! She had always imagined that would be just how he would propose to her. He would say: "Bella, my beautiful, what 's the matter with Ch-Cheviot?"

"Well, go on."

"If I did n't like him enough he said, what sort of man *was* I going to like? And I thought it only fair to give him some idea, so I tried to soften it by laughing a little —I 'd forgiven him by then, you know, for he 'd said *such* things—"

"What things?"

"Oh, sorry kind of things, and he looked so—so—well, I 'd forgiven him. But I told him plainly that if it ever is a question of the sort of man I am to care for, it won't be some one who is just nice and makes me have a good time. It will be some great, gloomy creature who makes me cry—and lifts me to the stars. I was laughing, but I meant it—and I said: 'I 'd worship *that* kind of man.' "

"What did he say then?"

"Well, he looked sort of down I thought, so I said:

'You would n't let me worship you, even if I could.' 'I 'd let you love me,' he said.''

''Oh-h. What else?''

''We went in after that.''

''And he was just as funny as ever,'' said Bella, clutching at frail comfort.

''Oh, quite,'' agreed Hildegarde.

It was small consolation to Miss Bella that Cheviot was singular in his obduracy. Before she was eighteen she was uncommonly well accustomed to seeing the stoutest masculine defenses go down before her. The two Mar boys had long been her devoted slaves. And Bella had flirted with both of them impartially, taking what she felt was only a becoming share in the interest all Valdivia felt in those go-ahead young men, whenever they came home for a visit. They were pointed to as models. Look how they ''got on''—they did it visibly—while you looked they seemed to have to restrain themselves from rising out of your sight. They kept Miss Bella supplied with candy and flowers and they corresponded with her when she went abroad. Secretly dreading the fascinations of the Britisher, they asked in scoffing postscripts how the effete nations were getting on. Bella's view of all this was that, provided the young men were ''nice,'' a girl could hardly have too many of them contending for her favor. It was what they were there for. Each time she came home, she brought the Mar boys a scarf-pin apiece, and pleased them still more by invariably demanding a cent in return. ''I can't *give* you a thing with a point. Something dreadful would happen! you must buy them.'' That looked, they felt, as if she were ''taking it seriously''—but which was she taking?

The year that Bella was eighteen, after a summer in England, she arrived at Staten Island just in time to celebrate her birthday. She was full of joy at getting back.

The conscious approval that she bestowed on the greater splendor of the American autumn had been generously extended to the profusion of fine fruit that greets one here at breakfast, to the individual bathrooms, even to the spacious, drawered, behooked, and shelved clothes-closets so agreeably numerous in the American house. The same satisfaction with which she had noted these things consciously revisited her as she trod the wide, shallow steps of the staircase, that in its descent halted leisurely upon two broad landings, having each a large unglazed window opening upon the hall below. The observant young eyes paid a flitting tribute to the beautiful woodwork of the balusters and the great tall doors of the rooms she passed, deciding as she went, there 's nothing nicer than a new American house, unless it 's an old (and a very old) English one. Even then, to *live* in, give her the American.

Like so many of the first generation born in "the States," this child of an old-world father was more American in tastes and spirit than any daughter of the Revolution. But, partly as a matter of physical inheritance, partly, perhaps, because of her frequent visits to England, she bore about her still a good deal of the peculiar stamp of a certain type of English girl. As she came trailing slowly down the wide staircase of Tom Wayne's country house on Staten Island, the practised eye would have little difficulty in detecting a difference between the figure on the stair and the typical "Amer-

ican beauty,'' a something less sumptuous and more distinguished. Her head held not quite so high, and yet in her carriage something indefinably more aloof. The longer waist, not quite so ruthlessly stayed and belted, giving an effect of greater ease; the longer neck, the shoulders a little more sloping, the eyes less eager and yet with more vision in them—something in the whole, gracious as the aspect was, a little reluctant and more than a little elusive. The Paquin gown Bella had brought back and wore to-night for the first time, was long, and straight, and plainer than prescribed by the New York fashion of the moment—a gauze, discreetly iridescent, showing over a white satin petticoat shifting lights of pink, and pearl, and silver, a gown that shimmered as the wearer walked, and clothed her in glancing light and soft-hued shadows.

Bella knew that she was very early, and she came down slowly, drawing a long glove up her slim, bare arm. When she reached the square window on the lower landing, she stopped, laid the other glove on the sill, and proceeded to button the one she had on. A slight noise in the hall below made her lean her arms on the broad, polished sill of the opening, and look down.

A man stood by a table facing her, but with eyes bent upon the books he was turning over—a man rather over medium height, sunburnt, with a lean, clean-shaven face, fair hair, and clean cut mouth and chin. That was all she had time to take in before he raised his eyes.

''Oh!'' ejaculated Bella, involuntarily, and then after meeting a moment longer the wide, unwinking, upward look, ''How do you do!'' she said.

''How do you do,'' echoed the sunburnt man, and he

did not bow nor move; just stood looking at the picture up there on the wall.

Miss Bella was not as a rule easily embarrassed, but she was conscious now of feeling a little at a loss.

"I don't know exactly why I am in such a hurry to say 'how do you do,' that I can't wait till I come down. But I do know you, don't I?"

"Of course you know me"; but that time he smiled, and Bella said to herself, how *could* I have forgotten anybody so—so—

She picked up her glove with the intention of running down. But, I expect I look rather nice here in the window, she reflected, and instead of going down instantly she said: "It 's some time since I was here before."

"Yes, it 's a long time," he answered. His tone pleased her.

"And I run about the world such a lot, I can't be expected to remember everybody's name just all at once, can I?"

"Oh, the name does n't matter."

"Does that mean you are n't quite sure of mine?"

"I have n't the faintest notion of it."

"Then how do you know—what made you say, 'Of course I knew you'?"

"Because I was sure you did."

"Why should I remember you, any more than you should remember me? Are you somebody very special?"

"*Very* special."

"Who?"

"Oh, you 'll hear."

"How shall I hear?"

"I 'll tell you myself."

"Well, go on."

"I can't, now."

"Why not?"

"You—you 're too far off."

"When I come down, you 'll tell me?"

"*Will* you?—will you ever come down?" He was smiling.

"Why should n't I?" she said, bewildered.

"I never saw it tried before."

"Never saw me try to come down-stairs!"

"Never, yet."

Had he been here that time she sprained her ankle? "Do you imagine I 'm lame?"

"On the contrary, I 'm ready to believe you have wings. Please fly down."

"What a very odd person you are! I can't think how I came to forget—"

He made no answer. Just stood there leaning against the heavy table, half-smiling and never turning away his eyes.

She caught up her glove and ran down several steps, but just before she reached the open place where the stair turned abruptly, and the solid wall gave way to a procession of slender pillars, she stopped, overcome by a sudden rush of shyness. Behind that last yard of sheltering wall she waited breathless, while you might count seven, and then turned on a noiseless foot and fled upstairs, bending low as she passed the square windows, so that not even the top of her brown head should be visible to that very odd man waiting for her down there in the hall.

She reappeared ten minutes later with the first batch

of guests, and while they were speaking to their hostess, the sunburnt man made his way to Bella, and held out his hand.

"It took you a long time," he said. "How did you manage it?"

"Manage what?"

"Getting down. You 're the cleverest picture I ever saw on any wall. How long do they give you?"

"Out of the frame?" she said, catching up his fancy with a laugh. "Oh, only long enough to find out what you 've done to make you the special person you say you are."

"It 's not what I *have* done, but what I shall do."

"Well, I 'm very much disappointed. I thought you must be distinguished, and now I see you 're only conceited."

He smiled—he was rather wonderful when he smiled.

"Of course, I know perfectly well we 've met before," Bella went on, "but I don't remember who you are."

"I 'll tell you some day."

"Some day? How absurd. Why not now?"

"Because the surprise might be too great."

She opened her eyes yet wider and laughed as a girl will in recognition of a point she sees as yet only with the eye of faith. "Did n't you promise you 'd tell me if I came down?"

"But you have n't come down. You are still far out of reach."

"It 's ridiculous of you not to tell me your name."

"My name would n't mean anything to you—not yet. You would n't know it."

"What!" She drew back.

"But we have met," he reassured her hurriedly.

"I felt we must have, but where was it?"

"I can't quite remember, either. It may have been when you were Queen in Babylon and I was a Christian slave."

She drew nearer with lit face. "Oh, do you believe in all those delightful things?"

"I believe—" he began on a different and lower note and then he stopped suddenly. Bella's upturned face silently begged him to go on with his profession of faith.

But just then, Bella's brother, having passed a boring guest on to his wife, came between the two who stood so oblivious of the rest of the company. The apparition of Tom Wayne brought Bella back to the every-day world, and to a half-frightened self-criticism, in view of the long flight she had taken from it in the last few seconds.

Her brother laid an affectionate hand on the shoulder of the sunburnt man, and said, laughing, to Bella: "You must be careful with this person. He 's the most desperate flirt."

Bella winced inwardly, but she disguised the little hurt with smiling mockery. "Really! I should *never* have thought it!"

"Oh, yes, goes off with first one heart and then another. And he goes so far! That 's the worst of him."

"Where does he go?"

"Lord knows! Let 's see, what God-forgotten place was the last book about?"

"Oh, you write books? Then you *are* distinguished—"

"You are n't telling me you did n't know who it was?" exclaimed her brother.

"Well, I thought I did, and I 've been behaving as if I did."

There was a general movement to the dining-room, but Tom paused long enough to say with mock formality: "Miss Wayne, Mr. John Galbraith."

"*Oh!*" ejaculated the girl, growing pink with excitement. "Are you Hildegarde's Jack?"

The sunburnt man looked mystified a moment, and then with sudden daring, "Is your name Hildegarde?" he said.

This was on the twenty-fourth of September. Six days later she began a letter to her friend.

"Oh, Hildegarde! Hildegarde! You 're quite right. He 's the most wonderful person in the world, and I hope you don't mind, but we are engaged to be married—Jack Galbraith and I! It turns out that he 's an old friend of Marion's family, and after she married my brother, when Jack came to see them last winter, Tom liked him awfully—of course everybody does that—and since then they 've all three been great friends.

"And one of the first things he asked me when he heard Tom came from near Valdivia, was all about you—I mean your father. He says such beautiful things about your father, and how kind he was when Jack was a poor, forlorn, little boy. But oh, Hildegarde! he 's the most glorious person now you ever saw in your life. The old faded photograph is n't a bit like him. I am sending you a new one, and that is n't like him, either. But I am going to get a silver frame for it and I shall be dreadfully hurt if you don't put it on the altar-table, with the old locket and the roses—if you 're really glad of our happi-

ness you 'll even burn a joss now and then for our sake. I 'm miserable when I think how little good any photograph of such a person is! You can't imagine what it 's like when he smiles. All the whole earth smiles, too. I adore him when he smiles—and when he does n't. I adore him every minute, except when he talks about Franz Josef Land, or something disgusting like that. But then he does n't do it much—never, except when Mr. Borisoff is here. Mr. Borisoff is a man I can't stop to tell you about, only I don't like him, and I shall let Jack know some day that I don't think he is a good influence.

"But I began to say that you must n't think Jack is the least solemn as his letters used to sound and as the pictures make out. In fact, he began our acquaintance by flirting quite desperately, but he says it was n't flirting at all. He meant all those things! He says they were a profession of faith upon a miraculous revelation (that 's me—I 'm the miraculous revelation!), and it only sounded flirtatious because I did n't realize, as he did, that we had been waiting for one another.

"He 's waited a good deal longer that I have, poor Jack! He 's more than twelve years older than I am; do you remember how you used to throw that in my face? But it does n't matter the least in the world. Besides, you 'd never think he was so old—he 's such a darling; and he talks like a poet, and a painter, and an archangel, all rolled into one. I am so wildly happy I can't write a proper letter, only I do want you to know that your mother is mistaken, as we always thought. Jack is a saint—simply a saint. When my father behaved quite horridly, and said he could n't have me marrying a man who went away for two or three years on long, scientific expeditions, Jack said he would n't do it any more,

though I think it cost him something to say that. He was quite silent for hours afterward, and did n't even notice I 'd done my hair differently. And that horrid Mr. Borisoff was in such a rage. He did n't say anything, but oh! he looked. But now he 's gone away, thank goodness, and I shall try to make Jack not ever see him again. Then another thing, just to show you what a perfect angel Jack is. My mother said I was delicate and too young, and things like that, and she got father to agree that I was only eighteen and was the weakling of the family, and they made up their wicked old minds that I must n't be married right away as Jack and I had arranged. And what do you think? Jack said he would wait for me? A whole year! I cried when they settled that, but was n't he a seraph? Fathers and mothers are very selfish; I shall not treat my daughters like that.

"How Jack and I will ever get through a year of waiting is more than either of us know. I am not coming home till the first week in December, and Jack 's coming to us for Christmas. And then you 'll see him! I hope you are pleased that I 'm going to marry the man we 've talked so much about. It seems like another bond, does n't it? How is Louis Cheviot? I can forgive him now for always liking you best. I can't imagine how I ever looked at him. Oh, Hildegarde, Jack is a perfect—well, I never heard the word that was beautiful enough to describe him.

"Good-by, I hear him now out in the garden. Jack is the most perfect whistler.

"Your loving and devoted

"Bella."

CHAPTER VII

DECEMBER did not bring Galbraith—nor even Bella.

"Jack found he could n't leave that odious Mr. Borisoff to settle up some business all alone, but my brother Tom has got mama to consent to stay over Christmas with me in New York at Marion's. So Jack and I shan't die, as we fully intended to if we were separated."

Just as the girl and her mother, early in the new year, were at last going home, a cable came from England to say that Bella's sister, Mrs. Hilton, had been badly hurt in a carriage accident.

The cable was couched in the most alarming terms—there seemed to be every prospect of three little children being left motherless. Bella and her mother took the first ship that sailed.

"If we have to stay any time, Jack says he will come over."

They did stay, and Jack was as good as his word. Mrs. Hilton did not die, but she lay for months in a critical condition, and her mother mounted guard over the new baby and the three other little people.

Bella meanwhile was amusing herself right royally.

"I 've been presented and I 'm having a perfect, rapturous time.

"And now it 's decided we don't have to wait quite a whole year—we are going to be married before we come back to America, some time in the summer. Just think of it, Hildegarde! You and I not to meet again till I 'm married! Oh, do write and say you 'll love me just as much as ever."

Then for a time no more long letters, but a shower of happy little notes, that descended with tolerable regularity. After that, the wedding invitation! Ten days' interval and then two communications by the same mail. The first:

"Dearest Hildegarde:

"Mother and I are just back from a week-end at Tryston. It was rather dull. All the men were immensely distinguished and at least eighty. I was glad to get back to town. Hengler's Circus has been turned into a skating-rink. We all went to a delightful party there last week. The wife of the Governor-General of Canada skated most wonderfully. I wish I could. Jack did n't take his eyes off her. Mr. Borisoff has come to London. I hate Mr. Borisoff as much as ever, if not worse.

"I have n't time for more if I 'm to catch this post. But I can't have you thinking I forget you in my happiness. Besides, I shall be happier when Mr. Borisoff goes back to his fellow-barbarians, and leaves me and Jack alone. The next, I promise, shall be a great, long letter. You 'll see! I do love you, Hildegarde.

"From your loving

"Bella.

"P. S. I wish you were here."

It struck Hildegarde it was the first time she had said that since Jack had appeared on the scene.

The other letter was without date or beginning.

"Jack and I have quarreled. Oh, if you were here!

"BELLA."

Immediately after, a mysterious cable, that told simply the date of Bella's homeward sailing. Had the quarrel frightened her lover and so hastened on the marriage? But no, for while Bella was still upon the sea came a formal notice that the marriage was "postponed." It had been mailed some days before the cable was sent.

HILDEGARDE'S first feeling upon Bella's return was that since the writing of that final note from London, and the dispatching of the postponement notice, the trouble, whatever it had been, was patched up. Impossible to think there was a cloud in her sky. Not matured at all; only a little thinner and, save for that, exactly the same Bella—"unthinking, idle, wild, and young."

But as the minutes went by and she ran from one familiar thing to another in garden and house, with greeting and gay comment, spinning out the time till she and Hildegarde should be alone together, the older girl began to have her doubts. Was Bella as happy as she pretended, flitting about with all her "dear Mars?"

Nothing possible to gather from her eagerness to be assured that so far from being forgotten, she was more than ever an object of interest and devotion. Nothing new Bella's little weakness for wanting everybody to be visibly enlivened by her return from "abroad," bringing

her adorable frocks (for Bella's American mama had come into money, and Bella was helping her to come out of a certain portion), bringing remembrances for everybody, bringing a whiff of foreign airs, and a touch of something exciting, exotic, into the lives of stay-at-home folk. Bella had always been one of those who, however much adored, would like to be adored yet a little more. She could n't bear that any one within reach of her influence should escape caring about her, and she cast a net uncommon wide. It was meant to enmesh even Hildegarde's mother, partly because that lady was so little lavish in bestowing her affection, but mostly because if you were much in the Mar house it mattered enormously upon what terms you were with Mrs. Mar. But, as ill-luck would have it, Bella never thought of the lady once she was away from her. Though she had brought back scarf-pins for the boys, and a silver-mounted blackthorn for Mr. Mar, and a quite wonderful necklace for Hildegarde, there was nothing—nothing at all for Mrs. Mar—and it was serious.

Bella never realized the awful omission till, having dispensed the other gifts, she stood with the rest of the family in the garden, not even asking where Mrs. Mar was, till looking up, she saw that lady at her bedroom window carefully trying on a new pair of gloves. "Everything depends on the way they 're put on the first time." Bella could hear her saying it, and she looked up smiling and waving her hand, as much as to say, "Oh, please hurry down! *You 're* the person I 'm pining most of all to see again." But, of herself, Miss Bella was silently asking, "What *am* I to do! What will happen if she should see she 's the only one I 've forgot-

ten?'' Bella's brain worked feverishly. Glancing down, her eye fell on a gold pencil she was wearing on a chain. Surreptitiously detaching this latest gift of her mother's, Bella slipped it in her pocket, talking all the time; telling Mr. Mar what it felt like to see sunshine, real Californian sunshine again; offering up to public scorn the English girl who had disapproved of the unappreciative Californians for rooting arum lilies out of their gardens, and throwing them away in sheaves, which Bella admitted was what they did with the ''pest.'' ''Just like your American extravagance,'' the English girl had said.

Oh, it was so perfectly heavenly to be at home again! Bella beamed in her old conscienceless way at poor Trenn, who found a heady tonic—a hope new born, in hearing the adored one call the Mar house ''home.''

But even while he was savoring the sweetness of that thought, there was the distracting creature linking her arm in Harry's, and saying: ''Come away a moment and tell me something I want to know.''

What could a boy like Harry possibly tell Bella that she could want to know!

Harry's own huge satisfaction in the incident was cruelly damped upon Bella's saying: ''Does your mother still love stumps?''

''Stumps! Love s-stumps!'' he muttered, in amazement.

''Yes. You have n't forgotten how she always kept her pencils till they were so little nobody else could have held on to them.''

''Oh, that kind. Yes. Stumps! I see.''

''Well, does she dote on them as much as ever? Does she pick them out of the fender, when Mr. Mar has

thrown his away? Does she still say: 'Well, *I 'm* not so well off that I can put a thing in the fire that 's only half-used?' Does she do that the same as ever, or are you all too rich now?''

Harry laughed. ''Oh, we 'll never be so rich that mother won't use a pencil to its last grasp.''

''Well, then, I 've got the very thing for her! A nice gold one—pencil, you know. But rather a stump, too. See?—just her size!''

Harry looked doubtfully down upon the somewhat massive pencil-case which Bella had drawn from her pocket and was telescoping in and out. ''That 's an awfully fine one, but I can't quite imagine mother giving up her—''

''Well, look here,'' interrupted Bella, ''Mrs. Mar 's a person you can't take risks with. Do you mind going up-stairs and showing her this? Just ask her what she thinks of it—as though I 'd brought it to you, you know.'' Harry departed on the errand, while Bella returned to the others, but her emissary was back directly with a doubtful face, and Mrs. Mar following not far behind.

''Well?'' Bella demanded in an undertone.

''Oh—a—I asked her if she did n't think it was an awfully fine one, and all she said was: 'The Lord was very good. He had delivered her many years ago from gold pencils.' ''

''What on earth does she mean?''

''Have n't the ghost— 'Sh!''

''Oh, how do you do, dear Mrs. Mar!'' Bella flew to embrace the lady, who received the advance with self-possession, but not without a glint of pleasure.

Harry still stood with the intended tribute in his hand. Mrs. Mar's eye fell upon it critically.

"Is it true—a—you don't think much of gold pencils?" hazarded Bella.

"Oh, if you 're a person of leisure—"

"What 's that got to do with it?"

"It 's a pursuit in itself, keeping a gold pencil going."

"Oh, no. Look. This one goes beautifully." Bella took it from Harry and shot it in and out.

"That 's just its wiliness. Wait till you *need* it."

"Really this one 's very good. It 's warranted—"

"*I 'll* warrant it 'll always be wanting a new lead. Especially at the moment when you can't possibly stop to niggle about with fitting one in. Then you 'll put the thing away till you can take an afternoon off just to get your handsome gold pencil into working order again. And when you 've done that and gone thoroughly into the subject, you 'll find there is n't a store on the Pacific coast that keeps your size leads. No lead in any store will ever fit your pencil. Then you 'll write to New York to a manufactory. Then you 'll wait a month, maybe two. Then, by the time you 've got them, you 'll find the pencil has forgotten how to assimilate leads. It will break them off short and spit them out. If you try to discipline the pencil, it 'll turn sulky and refuse to open. Or it stays open and refuses to shut."

"I assure you, Mrs. Mar, *this* one—"

"And I assure you, Miss Bella Wayne, that even if you 're under the special favor of Providence, and none of these things happen, you 'll still find you can never get the work out of a twenty-dollar gold pencil that you can out of a five-cent cedar."

Bella was catching Harry's eye and trying not to laugh.

"And remember what I tell you," Mrs. Mar wound up, "you 'll have to treat that gold pencil as you treat Mrs. Harrington Trennor, with reverence and awe. If you don't you 'll be sorry. If you lean on it, it will collapse. If you do anything but admire it, it will teach you better." Bella opened her lips—Mrs. Mar stopped her with, "Unless you come to my way of thinking, you 'll use that pencil in fear and trembling till the merciful grave offers you a refuge from your slavery. As I told Harry" —she buttoned the last button on her new gloves (why had n't Bella brought her anything as sensible as gloves!) and she drew down her cuff with a business-like air—"the Lord has delivered me from many snares; gold pencils among the rest!" And she marched off toward the gate.

"Oh, mother," said Hildegarde, at her side, "how could you! That dear little Bella brought the beautiful gold pencil for you all the way from Europe."

"Do you suppose I did n't guess that? Good-by!" She looked back and nodded to Bella. "I 've got to go to the missionary meeting now, but I 'll see you at supper."

"Oh, and you 'll tell me the rest then?" asked the wicked Bella, with an innocent look.

"The rest!" Mrs. Mar glanced sharply over her shoulder as she laid her hand on the latch of the gate. "There *is* no rest for anybody who depends on a contrivance like that. Whenever I see a person with a gold pencil, I know it won't be long before she 's asking me to lend her my wooden stump. As a rule she likes my wooden stump so well she walks off with it."

As Mrs. Mar vanished round the corner, Bella gave way to suppressed chuckles. Impossible to think she had a care in the world greater than a rejected gold pencil.

"Yes, Hildegarde. I 'm coming directly; only Trenn has n't given me a spray of lemon verbena yet, to console me for the scandalous way his mother treats me. Don't you remember you *always* give me lemon verbena when we 're in the garden?" She showed no impatience when Trenn prolonged the time-honored process—not a bit of it, went on laughing and chattering there in the sunshine and telling how they thought in England that the American girl was only keeping up the transatlantic reputation for "telling tall stories," when Bella had said that verbena at home was a tree, and grew to the second-story window. Then having undone in half an hour any good of peace regained by the "Mar boys" through her absence and engagement, Miss Bella found her way upstairs.

Her vivacity fell visibly from the moment she crossed the threshold of Hildegarde's familiar little room. But she commented favorably upon the new home-worked counterpane, and then, as though without seeing it, walked past the familiar old altar-table, with its ferny background and the roses ranged below. There was the big silver locket hung above, like some peasant's votive offering at a foreign shrine, and down there in front of the massed roses was that other picture, that had been new only a year ago, when Bella's happiness was born.

She went straight to the window and stood quite silent, looking down upon Hildegarde's flower borders. Then

without turning round, "Will you do something for me?"

"What?"

"Take that picture away. The locket, too."

"Oh, Bella! Is it as bad as that?"

"You 'll put them out of sight?"

"Yes, yes; of course I will."

"*Now!*" She might as well have said: I won't turn round until they 're gone.

Hildegarde opened a drawer. "I 'll put them in here till things come right again."

"Things are n't ever coming right."

"Bella!"

Not till she heard the drawer shut did the girl turn from the window, and Hildegarde could see that the small face was quivering.

"Bella, dear!" Her friend swept to her on a sudden wave of pity. "It will all come right."

But the younger girl drew back. Although her tears were brimming she spoke with a certain half-choked hardness: "I 've hurried mother back as fast as boats and trains could bring us; just to be with you again, but not to hear you say that. I wanted to be with you just because you will know better. Hildegarde—I—I 'd like to stay with you awhile. May I?"

"I want nothing so much—we all want you."

"Trenn, too?" she actually laughed through her tears. What a queer creature.

"Trenn, too. Only"—Hildegarde glanced from the empty place on the altar-table, to the shut drawer—"only you 'll be kind enough not to break Trenn's heart as well."

"As well as my own?"

Hildegarde's face grew hard with the words, "As well as Jack Galbraith's."

Bella, too, was grave enough now; "I have n't broken his heart. But—I 've got a crack in my own. Only"—she lifted her pretty eyes with an air almost of panic—"only nobody else is to know. You"—she came nearer and laid a nervous hand on Hildegarde's firm arm—"you must help me to keep everybody from knowing."

"Dear," was all Hildegarde's answer, but she leaned her cheek against Bella's thin face.

"And there 's another thing," the younger girl went on a little feverishly, still clinging to Hildegarde's arm, "I hate talking about it."

"Of course. Just at first, it must be—"

"No, it is n't 'of course' and it 's not only at first. It 's for always. Most girls talk their love affairs to tatters. I 've noticed that. I want you to help me to—to keep my—" Her voice went out upon a sudden flood of tears. Hildegarde drew her into the window-seat and sat down beside her. They were silent for a time, until Bella laid her wet face down on her friend's shoulder with, "Mind, Hildegarde! We are n't to talk about it. Not even you and I. John Galbraith is too—too—" She raised her head, drew her small hand across her eyes, and then sprang up and faced the window, as if some enemy without had challenged her. "It may be that I *don't* understand what a great man he is, as Mr. Borisoff says. But, at least, I know he 's not the sort of person to be chattered over."

Hildegarde remembered with a sting how for years she

had "chattered" with Galbraith for her theme. And she had n't little Bella's excuse. Yes, it was always like this. She was for ever stumbling upon something dignified and fine in Butterfly Bella.

The pretty tear-stained face was lifted to the sunlight, and the childish red mouth, so used to laughter, was pitifully grave, as Bella, staring up into the square of sky over Hildegarde's head said: "He is up there!"

"Jack!" Hildegarde exclaimed in a half-whisper.

"John Galbraith," said Bella. "He is way up there, and I won't be the one to pull him down."

"Oh-h. I was half afraid you meant he was dead."

"As good as dead."

Fear took fresh hold on the older girl. He is going to marry some one else, Hildegarde said to herself. Yes, yes; as she looked at poor Bella's face, she was sure of it. And now the slim little figure had sunk on its knees. She leaned against her friend for support. But she looked out across Hildegarde's shoulder, searching space through tears. Hildegarde held tight the childish-looking hands, and asked the last question she was ever to put about the common hero of their girlhood. "Where is he?" she said.

"He 's gone off with Mr. Borisoff somewhere."

"You mean you don't know where?"

"Somewhere in the arctic." She hid her face in Hildegarde's lap.

They sat so a long, long time.

In spite of her year's absence, Bella found nothing much changed in the Valdivia situation, except that the Mar boys had "got on" more than ever, and that their father's

form of progress seemed still more strikingly to consist in "getting on" in years.

It was a long time since his wife had given him the credit for doing more than his share at the bank with a view to promotion to be head cashier, or even a "silent partner." Each time a vacancy occurred some one else had stepped into it; Louis Cheviot had been the last. But Mrs. Mar learned through the years that the reason her husband accepted increased tasks was that he was born to bear burdens, as the sparks to fly upward. If any extra work was "going," so to speak, it gravitated unerringly to Nathaniel Mar. As to the question of his reward, what would be gained by giving a better position to a man who in any crisis could be depended on to do all the work of a higher office, and never ask for increased emolument? The only person who ever hinted such a thing to the Trennors had been Cousin Harriet. The Trennor Brothers' success (which was proverbial in Valdivia) had long extended to avoidance of Cousin Harriet. Certainly Mr. Mar's life-long ill-luck brought out more clearly the fact of his boys' early prosperity. Not that it was enormous as yet, though quite sufficient to have enabled them to marry, had they so chosen.

Mrs. Mar's satisfaction in her sons was checkered by the fact that each of these otherwise reasonable and enterprising young men clung to his boyish infatuation for Bella Wayne, long after their boyhood had gone the way of the years. It certainly did seem as though not till one or both were cut out by her marrying some one else, would either Trenn or Harry look at any of the girls Mrs. Mar considered more desirable. Not that the boys' mother had been able wholly to escape the general Mar

devotion to the disturber of their peace, but as the seasons passed, and Bella rejected one swain after another, it became increasingly vexatious to Mrs. Mar that her sons should not realize and amend the stupidity of caring about a girl who was more and more under suspicion of being handicapped by a silly passion for a mad fool who had given up the substance for the shadow, and had met his due reward—being now these many months lost in the arctic ice.

Hildegarde's theory that since the unhappy issue of the love affair, Bella had greater need of her friend than ever before, and Hildegarde's own consequent inaccessibility to others was the cause of some restiveness on Cheviot's part. His old friendliness for Bella had vanished. He spoke of her with a humorous disparagement that did him ill-service with Hildegarde. But he was grave enough sometimes.

"I never get a word alone with you, nowadays," he said one night, as he sat smoking on the steps of the porch at Hildegarde's feet, while Bella walked about the garden with Trenn. Hildegarde made some perfunctory answer, and they sat silent for a time.

The light wind brought up waves of fragrance from the tangle of roses under Hildegarde's window, and the little path stretched away to indefiniteness in the starlight, till it was lost long before it reached the garden's end. The limits of the narrow inclosure, so sharply drawn by day, were nobly enlarged, lost even, at this hour, in the dim reaches of green turned silver and black, as the moon came over the tops of the conifers.

Down by the arbor vitæ hedge growing things that

Hildegarde had planted sent their souls to her across the lawn, piercing the heavier air of roses with arrowy shafts of spicy sweetness.

On such a night no one is alone. Where two go down a darkling walk, or sit on the steps in the dusk, others gather round them. Invisible presences—the singers, the beautiful ones, the stern doers of great deeds—join us common folk, and give us a share in their glory or their steadfast pain. Hopes of our own, that look too large by day—too dim and inaccessible, they come walking in our garden at such an hour, beckoning us or looking, smiling, on. Living men, rumored to be far away, suddenly stand before us. Women who have been long aloof draw near. All the barriers go down. Even the dead come home.

John Galbraith was down there, where Bella's white gown shone among the trees, and John Galbraith was sitting between those other two on the steps.

And Cheviot knew it.

Hildegarde was reminded of the visible presence by his saying, in a low voice, that he understood the reason of his ill-success with her.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, Bella told me. Years ago. When she was so little you thought she—"

"Told you what?"

"That you had been in love with John Galbraith since you were sixteen."

"But you must see that 's absurd. I 've never even seen him!"

"I wish to God you had! Then you might get over it."

Hildegarde roused herself to say with equal emphasis, "You are really talking the greatest foolishness—"

"Have n't you got his picture in your room this moment?"

"I have the picture he—had taken for Bella."

"Before he ever met Bella you had a picture of Galbraith. You used to wear it. Bella said—"

"You seem to forget you 're talking about what happened when I was a little school-girl, and about an old—a very old friend of my family. We all have pictures of Mr. Galbraith—and, why, there 's one of you there, too."

"On the altar?"

(Oh, Bella! Bella! How could you!) "The one on the flower-table was put there because Bella asked me to. It 's not there any more. And while it was, I looked upon it as the future husband of my dearest friend."

But the description of Bella sounded suddenly ironic. It hurt. For Cheviot was the man who all along had laughed at girls' friendships, and all along he had known that Bella was capable of—

"It is n't that I could n't forgive you for not being in love with me," he said. "But for being in love with a photograph and a packet of letters—*no!* that was n't easy. At the same time I knew well enough that if your life had n't been so narrow, you would n't have been so at the mercy of this one romantic figure in it. If you 'd been able to travel, or even to go to the university—if you 'd had *any* other door open, you would n't have looked so long out of that one window."

A scrap of one of Mrs. Browning's letters flew across her mind—the dearer somehow for being a little inco-

herent, not fitted together at all, yet finely consequent to the inner spirit—those words: "The pleasantest place in the house is the leaning out of the window."

Ah, it was very true of the Mar house.

"And your mother," Cheviot went on, "always ready to puncture any home-blown bubble with the needle of her wit; mercilessly critical, for fear her children should have too low standards; ready to flay anybody alive in the cause of education. Never letting you rest satisfied for a moment with the attainable—you must always be reaching out—reaching out—and when you reached out you touched Galbraith."

How strangely well he knew—this man. It was odd, but she could never again think him obtuse, at any rate. That comfort was gone.

"I was even sorry for you while the engagement lasted," the low voice went on, unmindful of the uneasy stir of the figure sitting above him in the dusk. He took the half-smoked cigar from his lips and laid it by the pillar. Over the edge of the porch the tip shone red. "I saw how hard it was for you; you had been weaving romances round Galbraith for years—you had looked upon him for so long as your special property—" Hildegarde drew back into the deeper shadow. But by his own suffering urged to win a companion in pain, he persisted: "And you thought if it had been *you* he had met, it would have been you that he—" Hildegarde's skirts rustled as if she were getting up—"Look here, I 've told you before you 've got a genius for truth—I 'm treating you on that basis." She said nothing, but she sat still. "There was a moment," Cheviot's voice was unnaturally low, "last spring, when I knew I was gaining ground

with you. It was the day I came back from Mexico. I came here straight from the station, and you—you—" She heard him strike his hands suddenly together in the dusk, and a curious excitement took hold of her. "When I went home, I found the invitation to Bella's wedding. It had been lying there for days. Then I understood. You had had all those days and nights to get accustomed to realizing it was the end of the old—where are you going? Can't you even bear to have me speak of it this once!"

The white figure was still again.

"Oh, I understood!" He picked up the cigar again. "I felt just the same as you did. I knew the ghost that had stood so long between us was suddenly gone. He had moved out of the way, and you could see that I was there. For those next days you were—you were— I was full of hope. Then came word that Bella had broken her engagement."

"No, that the marriage was postponed."

He waited a moment, seemed about to speak, and then, instead of saying anything, with a sharp movement he threw his half-smoked cigar across the whitening silver of the path into the inky blotch the shrubbery made. Hildegarde's eyes followed the flying red light till, against a tree trunk, it fell in a splash of sparks, and was swallowed up in shadow.

"I shan't forget," Cheviot went on, still on that low restrained note, "the look in your face as you said: 'I never thought they were suited to one another. It would never have done.'"

"*Did* I say that?"

"Yes, and I looked up and I saw the ghost was there

again, and presently I saw he was n't a ghost any longer, but a real man. An active expectation on your part—''

''No, no.'' The voice was less denial than beseeching.

''Yes, a *plan.*''

The hands that were gripping the wicker chair pulled her quickly to her feet. ''Bella!'' she called to the white flicker by the dial. ''It 's getting late!''

Cheviot stood up, too. ''On your honor, Hildegarde—'' Was it the moonlight blanched her, or was she indeed so white? His heart smote him—but, ''On your honor can you deny it?'' he demanded.

''No,'' she said, with sudden passion; ''I don't deny it.'' And while her words should have steeled him, her voice brought a lump to his throat.

''You mean,'' he asked, huskily, ''to wait till John Galbraith comes back?''

''I know it 's quite mad—but there! A thing can take you like that. You *can't* change.''

CHAPTER VIII

WITH the precision of clockwork, every day of his life but Sundays, Nathaniel Mar walked down the main street of Valdivia to the bank. People who lived out of sight of the City Hall timepiece, set their watches by the appearance of the lame man with the stick. He never varied the route, any more than he altered his time, and both had been exactly the same for twenty-eight years.

The other bank cashiers (few of them over thirty) said that, in their opinion, Mr. Mar had hung on quite long enough. They did not hesitate to add that his post would have fallen to a younger man years ago had Mar not been "a sort of relation." Even so it was pretty steep that an old codger of sixty should be blocking up the way like that. A bank was no place for the superannuated, unless, of course, a man was a director.

So acute was the hearing of the old codger (who was not yet sixty) that sotto-voce observations of this sort had, from time to time, reached his ears.

He saw all about him men, younger than himself, turned out of positions they had occupied, with usefulness and integrity, for years, and for no other reason than to make way for some "boy" in his early twenties. Men of his own standing had from time to time in the past decade raged hopelessly against this tendency in a

nation, where the great god, Efficiency, demands the fine flower of each man's life, and looks with disfavor upon lined faces and whitening hair, even when the capacity for service is unimpaired. It is part of the doctrine of "*show me.*" There being any good, or any force not capable of being "shown"—well, it was doubtful. Best not take chances.

Mar had sympathized with his contemporaries for being elbowed out of their places, but he had smiled at one or two who had suffered the common fate of the American clerk, in spite of having dyed their hair, and worn jaunty pince-nez instead of "good honest spectacles." Nevertheless, Mar's own secret uneasiness—not being assuaged by hair dye or dissipated by pince-nez—took the form of making him the more ready to be the Trennor Brothers' pack-horse, unconsciously the more eager to oblige any and everybody at the bank, to "show" from Monday morning to Saturday afternoon how indispensable he was. He knew they could get no one to do what he did with the same care and assiduity for the same salary. His astonishment was, therefore, hardly less than his chagrin, when he found upon his desk, one morning, a letter from the firm "terminating their long and pleasant connection upon the usual notice."

In the bitterness of that hour he felt that nothing he ever had suffered before had mattered so vitally. As long as a man has work he can bear trouble and disappointment—life without work—it was something not to be faced. For the work, little by little, had devoured everything else, narrowed down his friendships, cut off his recreations, produced a brain-fag that made him unfit even for reading anything but newspapers.

He set instantly about finding another post. The story of the days that followed—the writing to and interviewing whippersnapper young managers of flourishing concerns, and of being more or less cavalierly "turned down," as the slang phrase went—it would make a book of itself; a tragic and significant book to boot, and one essentially "American."

The Mar boys behaved very well. *They,* at least, were not surprised. They had, in point of fact, expected the occurrence long before.

What they had not expected was that the old man "would take it so mighty hard." Why, he could scarcely be more cut up if he were alone in the world—dependent entirely upon his own exertions—instead of having two fine go-ahead sons, who were getting on in life so rapidly that it really was n't a matter of vital importance whether the old man did anything or not; for they had every intention of being good to their father.

They told him so. And he had not shown himself grateful. And *still* they meant to be "good" to him. They were "mighty nice young men."

Nathaniel Mar saw clearly by the time the "notice" was up, that he lagged superfluous. There was no opening for him anywhere.

The first morning that he had no right to go down to the bank was one of the most difficult he had known. He went out just the same, at precisely the same moment, and came in at the usual time. No one knew where he had spent those hours, but he looked tired and ill when he sat down to the midday meal. After it was over, he said he thought he would "go up and lie down." He

had never done such a thing before in his life, at that hour of the day. The following mornings he spent at his writing-table in the dining-room, and although there were no screaming children there now, and the room was bright and pretty, he sat miserably, day after day, turning over old letters and papers, till in despair he would get up and take down a book to read. But his thoughts were all "down at the bank."

Mrs. Mar dashed in and out, called brisk directions to the Chinaman, who presided now in the kitchen, and when there was nothing else to do, she would fly at the sewing-machine. This appeared to be the kind of mechanism which was worked with the whole human body. The hands traveling briskly along with the moving seam, head going like a mandarin's, knees up, knees down, Mrs. Mar pedaled and buzzed away.

Her husband seldom spoke. Having retired within himself directly after the breakfast things were cleared away, he seemed to be averse from making the smallest movement while his wife was in the room. He sat there intensely still, even turning the leaf of his book only at long intervals, surreptitiously, without a sound. It was as though, by a death-like stillness, he should prove that he was not there. He was really down at the bank—his motionlessness seemed to say.

As if Mrs. Mar divined this mental ruse of his, and felt a need to unmask it, she would look at him sideways, and "What are you doing?" she would ask briskly.

"Reading."

"That old Franklin again? Why, you 've read it three or four times already!" No answer. "Why don't you get something up-to-date from the library?" Still

no response. "Content just to sit *and sit!*" she would comment inwardly. Then aloud, "Don't they want a manager up at Smithson's?"

"No."

"Why don't you try for the secretaryship of the New Pickwick?"

"Monty Fellowes has got it."

"Ah, well, I suppose Monty Fellowes went the length of asking for it."

Nathaniel Mar had also gone that length, though the post was beneath a man of his powers. But he could not tell over again at home the tale of his failures. Better she should think he had n't tried.

But, oh, the very look of him sat upon her spirit, and still she looked.

"You 'll be ill if you stay in the house so much. Remember you 've had a walk twice a day for going on thirty years." No answer. His immobility made it a positive necessity for her to get up and poke the fire vigorously, or do something with might and main. That was a thing *he* had never tried in his life—to do something with might and main! And that was why he was stranded like this now. A man of only fifty-eight! Why, she herself—Harriet T. Mar—was fifty-nine. And just see how *she* took hold of existence—very much as she gripped the poker. Oh, it was a trial living in the same house, and all day long in the same room with a "logy" man! He was more sodden with failure every day he lived. Misfortune acted upon him like an opiate. Ha! If she—Harriet T. Mar—were *ninety,* misfortune would sting her into action. At the mere thought she sprang up and stung her husband, or the imperturbable Mongol

in the kitchen, or the gentle Hildegarde. But truth to tell, though that girl *looked* such a tender, simple creature, it was as little rewarding to wrestle with Hildegarde as with Mar, or the stolid Chinaman.

Indeed, the more the mother bustled the quieter grew the girl—not at first consciously as a form of protest, but by a process of natural reaction that was largely responsible for Hildegarde's seeming calm to the verge of insensibility.

Mrs. Mar never wholly realized how much to the mother's exuberant energy the daughter owed her impassive air. These influences playing about sensitive people produce a curious rhythm in family life. Nathaniel Mar's supineness made his wife seize the reins and ceaselessly whip up the horses of their car. Mrs. Mar's frantic urging of the pace, the dust and noise and whip-cracking of her progress, produced not merely a yearning for peace in Hildegarde's mind, but a positive physical need to simulate it. People talk much of the value of good example, forgetting that we are sometimes shown there is nothing so salutary as a bad example, since out of example is wrought not merely the impulse toward imitation, but often a passionate realization of the advantage of "another way."

There was always in the Mar house one person with an eye upon the clock—why need you wear a watch?

No need for you to spur on a servant, or make example of a tardy errand boy. There was always Mrs. Mar to do these things with a swingeing efficacy. Those who live with the Mrs. Mars of the world do not realize that they owe their own reputation for sweetness largely to the caustic temper of some one else. Under Mrs. Mar's roof

you may "cultivate kindness" and not suffer for it. Away from her drastic influence, you yourself will have to apportion grace and discipline more evenly.

So various is life that we have sometimes a chance of learning from people's vices what their virtues could never so deeply have impressed.

Something of this the "slow" girl arrived at.

The day Mrs. Mar and Hildegarde went off to spend a week down at the ranch with the Waynes, the two came into the dining-room to say good-by to Mr. Mar. It was to be "a house-party," and Cheviot and Mr. Mar had been asked, too. Cheviot had accepted—"from Saturday night till Monday morning"—but Mar had declined to go for any length of time whatever.

"A body would think he had affairs too important to leave! Well, good-by, Nathaniel. Don't let hot cinders fall on the new hearth-rug. Take care of yourself, and I *hope* you 'll have some news for me when I come home."

Upon their return the following week, he was found sitting in exactly the same place, in the precise attitude, and one might almost think with the same old book on his knee open at the self-same page.

"Upon my soul!" ejaculated Mrs. Mar, stopping short on the threshold, while Hildegarde went forward to kiss her father. "No need to ask if you 've found anything to do! You have n't even remembered to put on a little coal." She fell upon the poker and punished the flagging fire. "Have you been sitting there like that ever since I went away?"

Mar drew himself out from Hildegarde's embrace, took firm hold on his walking-stick and rose to his feet. He

looked huge, as he towered above the two women, and rather wonderful, as both of them had often thought of late. Even the flippant Bella had said, "He 's more and more like Moses and the Prophets."

"As to sitting here"—he looked down sternly on his wife—"you may as well understand, Harriet, that this is the house I propose to sit in till I go out lying down. Only not in this room. I agree with you as to the unfitness of that." He limped over to the kitchen door, opened it, and said, "John, will you light a fire in the young gentlemen's bedroom."

Mrs. Mar stared a moment, and then went up-stairs to take off her things. It was no secret between her and Hildegarde that "after all" they stood a little in awe of the head of the house. The girl, however, knowing herself a privileged character, attempted to smooth things over with a little jest. She linked her arm in his, and told how her mother, on the way down in the train, had produced the book rest and a minute pencil from her traveling-bag, had fastened the rest on the back of the seat in front of her, to the surprise and inconvenience of the occupants, had set up the French biography, put on her spectacles, got out her crochet and read her "Lucien Pérey" and crocheted for dear life (or for the Hindus rather) every minute of the time that she was being rushed along by the express to Fern Lea; "and Louis Cheviot leaned over and whispered in my ear, 'Your mother 's losing time with her feet.' "

But Mar's faint smile was pretty grim. "Your mother has all the virtues, my dear, but she 's a woman of an implacable industry."

With the help of John Chinaman and the grocer's boy,

that very afternoon Mr. Mar got his big desk established in "the spare chamber" that had been Trenn's and Harry's room, and still was theirs when one or other of them was in town,—which was often enough whenever Bella was staying at the Mars'.

But whether it was that uncomfortable as the old quarters had been, it disturbed Mar to change them after thirty years, certainly, in spite of his pronouncement to his wife, he did not "sit" at home as much after this. He made a habit of going down town after breakfast, to the San Joaquin Hotel "to read the papers," really to smoke in peace, and exchange views on the political situation, or the Cuban atrocities, with chance travelers or old habitués.

Then came the day when Spanish incompetence and cruelty found a rival excitement. In a remote region of British North America gold had been discovered. The veterans in the San Joaquin reading-room pooh-poohed the notion—all but Nathaniel Mar.

From the beginning he took the Klondike seriously. Not long before everybody was doing the same. Instead of quickly exhausting itself the excitement grew. Had diamonds been discovered in Dakota, the matter would have been a nine days' wonder, and then died as the easily accessible fields were reached and appropriated. Paradox as it might appear, it was owing to the forbidding circumstances under which those pioneers of '97 found their treasure, that made the appeal "Klondike" so irresistible to the marvel-loving fancy of the world. The papers overflowed with accounts of the awful hardship and the huge reward—combination irresistible since history began. And if any Missourian said "show me!"

he *was* shown. The actual nuggets and the veritable dust, displayed in a bank window, made would-be miners of men as they passed, or as they meant to pass and stood riveted, staring, seeing there a type of what they might attain unto, if only they had much courage and a little money for an outfit. Who lacked the first? Who could not, for so alluring a purpose, collect the second?

The trains to the ports of San Francisco, Seattle, Victoria, were crammed; the north-bound ships overflowed. Unenterprising, indeed, any store on the Pacific coast that did not advertise some essential to a Klondike outfit. People talked with as much earnestness of the science of life under arctic conditions as they before had discussed Spanish misrule in the South. Even for the vast majority who had no hope of being able to join the rush, the great problem of transportation and the value of evaporated food stuffs, obscured many an issue nearer home.

The one man that he was on fairly intimate terms with, yet to whom Mar had not mentioned the new craze, was Cheviot. It was the kind of thing he would be certain to scoff at. People at the San Joaquin had noticed that scoffing at the Klondike annoyed Mr. Mar, and they wondered a little. Mar had quite made up his mind not to give Cheviot's skepticism a chance for expression. If you were unwary you might easily think, "So sympathetic and understanding a young man can't help taking fire over this burning question." And then Cheviot would show you how easily he could help it. Watch him playing with his little nephews and nieces and you 'd say, "So kind to children, he will be kind to the childishness in me." And behold he was n't. He was an "aw-

fully good fellow,'' but he expected a man to be grown up—and few are.

Mar's anticipation of what would be Cheviot's views about the new craze were very much Hildegarde's own. Her astonishment was therefore well-nigh speechless, when, on the occasion of his next visit, after ten minutes' general conversation in the garden, Cheviot said, ''By the way, Hildegarde, I 've come to tell you I 'm going to the Klondike.''

''You!'' and she stared at him in silence till she could reassure herself by saying, ''Nonsense!''

''It may be nonsense, but I 'm going.''

''You *can't* be in earnest!''

''Quite.''

She stood, watering-pot in hand, her big eyes wider than ever he had seen them, and a look on her face certainly disturbed, even annoyed.

It was n't very nice, this feeling as if the bottom were dropping out of existence. He had no right to make her feel like that.

Very neatly he switched off the head of a withered flower with his stick, and began, ''The Klondike—''

''It 's rather horrid of you,'' Hildegarde interrupted, ''but of course I know—you—you 're only seeing how I 'd take it—''

''I shan't be here to see how you 'll take it.''

She set down the watering can. ''You surely won't dream of doing anything so foolish—so—so—dangerous.''

He did n't answer, and she walked beside him down the path to the lower gate. When they got beyond the group of conifers, she stopped. ''You simply must n't.''

''Why do you say that? You don't care where I go.''

"You know quite well I do."

He did n't even look at her, and he shook his head. Then, after a little pause, "Who knows, you might even come to feel differently about things—if—if—"

"Do you mean"—Hildegarde drew herself up—"if you came home a millionaire?"

"If I did n't come home at all."

"What?"

"At least for a long time, like—"

"I certainly hope"—nervously she forestalled the utterance of that other name—"that you won't do anything so disappointing to all your old friends. It 's the kind of fortune-hunting expedition for the ne'er-do-well. It is n't for a man like you."

"Well, I 've thought it over," he said, "and I 've come to the conclusion that I 'm best out of Valdivia for a time. You see, Hildegarde, you 're too used to me."

"I 'm *not* 'too used.' "

"Too certain of me—yes, you are. I 've been uncommon helpless in the matter. I 've got nothing of the actor in me. I can't be near you, and inspire you with the smallest doubt as to how things are with me. The one thing I can do is *not* to be near. And that 's what I 'm going to do."

She wrinkled up her white forehead with a harassed attempt to keep her wits about her, and not be betrayed into rash professions. "You can go away from Valdivia for a while, if that idea is so attractive, without going to the horrible Klondike."

"Yes, I could go to Pasadena or some seaside resort, so that I could come running back, as I did last year from Monterey, on the first hint that you might be miss-

ing me a little. No, all that 's been tried. It does n't work. I must go to some place where I *can't* take the first train back; where I won't live through the day expecting a letter from you. It is n't easy in these times for anybody to be really 'out of reach.' When we all know that we 've only to go to the nearest telegraph office for news, we can't know what it would be like utterly to lose some one—unless death teaches us. The nearest approach to the sort of thing I mean—this side of Kingdom Come—is the Klondike."

"Oh, Klondike, Klondike! I 'm sick of the very sound of those two syllables. There 's something uncanny about them. People have gone mad since they heard the ugly word, but not you!"—to give her words more than common emphasis, to insure winning the day, she laid her hand on his arm, and said again, with soft deliberation—"Not you, Louis."

"You 'd like me to stay here and suffer. Yes, I know that." Her hand dropped from his sleeve. "But I shan't stay here," he went on unmoved, "and pretty soon I shan't suffer—so much."

From that old, recurrent touch of hardness in his voice and air, she once again recoiled. "Well, I 've said all I mean to say. You must please yourself."

"Pleasure is of course what one expects in the Klondike."

They walked in absolute silence back to the porch. Hildegarde went in at once, saying "good-night" over her shoulder, and quite sure that as usual he would follow her. But he stayed behind for fully twenty minutes, talking with Mr. Mar, who was smoking out there in the dusk. Hildegarde turned up the electric light in the

parlor, and moved about the room, picking up and putting down one book after another. How many of them he had given her—that provoking person who stayed so long talking to her father! By and by she heard her own name called. Was that her father? How curious his voice sounded!

"Yes," she answered, but made no great haste. When at last she reached her father's side, she could n't see where Cheviot was. She looked round in the dim light, and a little sharply, "Has he gone?" she said. As the words fell on the quiet air, she heard the gate shut. The sound jarred. It gave her a sensation as of a being abandoned. The house was very quiet to-night.

"Gone? Yes. Where 's your mother, Hildegarde?" Mar asked with unheard-of briskness.

"She 's over at the Coxes'."

"Ah!" A moment's pause, and then, "To think of Cheviot! Cheviot of all men! Were n't you surprised?"

"You are n't talking about the Klondike?"

"What else should I be talking of?" he demanded unreasonably, for after all there were other topics.

"Do you think he really means it?" Hildegarde asked.

"*Means* it?—with a year's leave granted, and his ticket in his pocket? He 's been getting ready all this week. That 's why we have n't seen him. Sails Wednesday."

"Not—not really!"

"Off to 'Frisco to-morrow," said her father, still in that odd brisk voice—"four days to see about his outfit. He—it 's a queer world!—he said Trenn had been into the bank this afternoon, and offered to grubstake him. But Cheviot 's got money. So anything he finds will be

his own. Trenn! H'm! *Trenn!*" he repeated, as though he could n't get over it. Then it seemed to dawn upon him that Hildegarde had been unprepared for something else than her brother's part in the affair. "I thought Cheviot said he 'd been talking to you about it —had said good-by."

"I—I did n't believe he was in earnest."

"Why not?" demanded her father a little harshly, and then, perceiving that her incredulity might have other grounds than disapproval of the enterprise in itself, he said more gently: "He talks very sensibly about it, my dear. A man can't save much at the bank—he may go on for thirty years and find— Cheviot has seen what that may come to. He gives himself a nine months' holiday, with the chance of its turning out the most profitable nine months of his life. *I* did n't discourage him."

Hildegarde sat down on the step. "Oh, you did n't discourage him," she repeated dully. Behind her own sense of being wronged in some way, as well as disappointed, she was conscious of an unwonted excitement in her father.

He, sitting there in the dusk, puffing out great clouds of smoke, was oblivious of everything except that the old pride of discovery had awaked in him, and the fever of his youth came back.

"Even Cheviot! And think of *Trenn!*" That Trenn should be looking about for some one to send to the North on this errand—it touched the topmost pinnacle of the fabulous. And yet, why not? The country was aflame. Thousands starting off on an uncertainty to try for the thing he, Nathaniel Mar, had been certain of.

"Hildegarde, where is your mother?"

"I told you, at the Coxes'."

"Oh, at the Coxes'."

"Why, father?"

"Would you like to know the reason I did n't discourage Cheviot from going to the—"

"Yes, father," said the girl dully.

"Then come nearer."

She moved toward him. Feeling a little dreary, she came quite close. She laid her head against the one strong knee.

In a vigorous undertone, the voice with new life in it told why Nathaniel Mar did n't blame any young man—there was more treasure in the North than even the Klondiker dreamed. Mar had known it all along—and then the story. In spite of the girl's listlessness when he began, he could feel directly that the thing was taking hold of her. She was intensely still; that was because she was being "held," and small wonder! It was a better story than he had realized. It took hold of him even, who knew it so well. Before he got to the end, his voice was shaking, and he leaned forward thirsting to see an answering excitement in the young face at his knee. But the darkness shrouded it, and he went on. He wished she would speak or move. Always so still, that girl! Now he was telling her of his home-coming from that barren coast in the North—explaining, excusing what, by this new lurid light of the Klondike, seemed inexcusable—his never going back. He tried to reconstruct for her the obstacles—huge, insurmountable; the long illness, and the new wife; the post at the bank; the children, poverty, skepticism and the obscuring dust of the years.

And lo! as he disturbed these ashes, he saw afresh the agonies they hid—remembered with a growing chill, what had befallen before whenever he told this story; saw the tolerant smile of the smug young bankers; saw the dull embarrassment in Elihu Cox's eye; heard Mrs. Mar leading the family chorus, "You 've got to *show* me!"

Even Hildegarde might ask—he hastened to forestall the dreaded word. "There was nothing to *show*," he said, "absolutely nothing to prove it was n't a dream." And she made no sign that for her either it was more than fantasy.

He wondered miserably why he had told her. "Of course it was all long before anybody had heard of the Klondike," he said, and he drew a heavy breath. "The theory was, that geologically speaking, gold could n't exist up there, and even people who were n't geologists agreed it could n't be got out if it *was* there"—all the confidential earnestness had vanished out of the voice, and he paused like one very weary. "Nobody believed—" He tried to go on, and to speak as usual, but memory, master of the show, brought up Trenn—Trenn with the look he had worn the day his father had told him the great secret. Mar drew back into the deeper shadow. But the critical boy face found his father out, and stung him in the dark.

He was an old fool. What had possessed him to rake it all up again. Oh, yes, he said bitterly in his heart, there was one member of his family who had n't yet smiled and said, "*Show me.* I 'm from Missouri." It was Hildegarde's turn.

"Well, my girl," he ended miserably, "that 's the story that nobody believed."

Hildegarde lifted her head and put up her two hands, feeling in the dark for his. But Mar shrank back. Not from Hildegarde herself could he in that hour take mere sympathy, craving hopelessly as he did with the long thirst of years a thing more precious than pity—the thing that he once had had and had no more.

Like a man who utters his own epitaph, "I lost faith myself," he said.

"But I have found it, father!" and there was joy as well as the sound of tears in the thrilling young voice.

"Found—what did you say, Hildegarde?"

"That I believe the gold 's there, waiting!"

"Ah—h—h!" He bent over her with a sound that was almost a sob. "Then I—I believe it, too!"

CHAPTER IX

LOUIS CHEVIOT was one of those who reached the Klondike in the autumn of '97. A lucky chance brought him the opportunity of going shares in a lay on Bonanza, with a man whose fitness for "pardnership" Cheviot had tested coming over the awful Pass and shooting the Hootalinqua Rapids.

The two had washed out ten thousand dollars apiece by the end of June. They had the prospect of making an even better thing of it the next year. Cheviot left his partner to carry on the development of the lease, and for himself, turned his bronzed face homeward.

He was as certain now as before he had garnered this experience that for wild life, *qua* wild life, he had no taste. That it should be so was partly, strange as it may sound, a result of the cool and balanced mixing of the elements in him. He had no physical sluggishness to be sloughed off by harsh impacts, no mental inertia to be hammered into action by hard necessity, no crust of chrysalis that must be broken before the winged life might emerge, no essential wildness of spirit that needed training, no excess of ungoverned ardor that needed cooling in the northern frosts.

And so it was that he was coming home with little gain but bullion, since he had gone forth with smaller

need than most of the lesson learnt in chastening the body, or the lightening revelation of some crashing danger.

He could endure hardship with reasonable patience for some reasonable end, but the gains of civilization were in his eyes too excellent to be even temporarily abandoned without a sense of heavy deprivation, which affected him like a loss of common dignity.

Even though he had n't one he loved the idea of home. He loved his friends and all the friendlier aspect of the earth, gardens, ordered communities of his kind, and all man's device for socializing life and regulating the unruliness of nature.

And there was Hildegarde—who had not answered either of his two letters. Why was that? He felt a contraction of the heart as he refused to allow himself to formulate surmise; yet if any one had come and said to him, "Galbraith 's in Valdivia," he would have felt it no surprise.

Some friends of his were going out by the Yukon River route. He knew it to be unlikely that he should return to this part of the world. As well see that more western aspect of it, too, since he might do so in congenial company.

It was really the company that decided him—that was responsible for a circumstance that changed the entire course of his own and several other lives. Instead of going back as he had come, by the shorter way, he found himself, at the end of July, with seventeen hundred miles of river behind him waiting at the mouth of the Yukon for the San Francisco steamer.

He heard with surprise that there was a letter for him

at the post-office. The more strange, if true, since his coming to St. Michaels was less than mere chance—it had been unlikely in the extreme.

However, upon demand, an envelop appeared in the window of the little post-office. Before ever it reached the hand of the man waiting without, he recognized Hildegarde's writing. He tore it open to read a hurried resumé of what she said she had already written him at length, to Dyea and to Dawson, and now repeated, on the bare possibility of his taking the American route home. For her father was just setting out by that same route to the far North, and by the same ship that carried her letter. His plan of campaign was not generally known, and all she could say with certainty was that he would be at St. Michaels some time in August. And she greatly hoped that if Cheviot should be passing that way, or even if he found that he could arrange to go there without too great personal cost, Hildegarde hoped, and even begged, that he would look out for her father. She "quite approved," Cheviot read with incredulous eyes—(Hildegarde! who had thought the expedition mad for a man young and sound as an oak)—she quite approved her father's going. At the same time she did not forget that he was no longer young, and being so lame was at a disadvantage. "Good Lord! I should say so!" The upshot was that she "lived upon the hope" that Cheviot would bring her news of Mr. Mar. The ideal thing would be that they should come home together. If Cheviot brought that about she would be "unendingly grateful."

No syllable about Galbraith.

Cheviot went straight to the Alaska Commercial Company's hotel and looked through the names registered

since the season opened. Not a Mar among them. So the ship that brought the letter had not brought Mr. Mar —for this was the only conceivable place he could have stayed in. It was no small personal relief to Cheviot to conclude that wiser counsels had prevailed.

The same afternoon it was noised about the office that a steamer had just been sighted. After all, Mar might only be delayed! While most of the population rushed down to the beach, Cheviot scribbled a hasty note and handed it to the clerk.

"If a man of that name should come in on this ship—" he began.

"He has n't gone back yet," interrupted the clerk, studying the superscription.

"You don't mean he 's here already?"

"Well, he *was.*"

"When? It can't be the person I mean?"

"Lame man, about sixty? Yes, yes, remember him perfectly. Could n't quite make him out, for he did n't seem to care a tinker's curse about getting to the Klondike. The boys set him down finally as a sort of a missionary, because" (with a laugh) "he seemed so ready to go the wrong way."

"Which way?"

"Up the coast to Golovin Bay." No, he had n't come back. A trader from Kwimkuk, who had been down for supplies, said Mar was staying up there at the Swedish Mission. That was all the clerk knew. He was turning the pages back to the entries of the previous summer. "That 's the man!" And there was Mar's unmistakable signature staring Cheviot in the face.

"But that 's '97," he said bewildered. He pulled out

Hildegarde's letter. and looked again at the date. It was a year old.

Shortie Hinkson stopped sweeping out the office to say: "One o' them missionary fellers come down here from Golovin Sat'day. No, he ain't gone back yit. I seen him only a while ago goin' by the A.C. office."

When a few minutes later, among the crowd down by the old Block House, the missionary was run to earth, Cheviot found him a great tow-headed Swede, looking as if he had been not so much cut out of wood as hacked out, and with a very dull implement at that. Close at his elbow, and appealed to now and then for verification of some statement, was a thin little dark man, with glittering black eyes and a turn for silence.

The tall missionary was bargaining about some "canned stuff" with the great A.C. Company's agent, Captain Seilberg. This magnate, leaning against one of the mounted cannon the Russians had left behind in '67, was looking through a spy-glass at the ship discernible on the far horizon, while between ejaculatory oaths he "did business" with the rugged Lutheran. Waiting for a chance to introduce himself, Cheviot wondered aside to a bystander why those two talked English to each other.

"Oh, Seilberg 's a Norwegian."

"No, a Dane," put in another, overhearing.

"I thought," said Cheviot, "they could all understand one another after a fashion—all Scandinavians."

"Scanda who? Well, anyway, they 're too thick on the ground in Alaska for us to bother about fine distinctions."

"Yes," agreed the customs officer, as Cheviot pressed forward to speak to the missionary, "so far as we 're concerned they 're all Scandahoojians together."

Certainly Mr. Christianson knew Mr. Mar. Mr. Mar was still at the Mission House up at Kwimkuk. How to get there? The big missionary turned to his silent companion, who still stood gloomily by. Mr. Björk and he would n't mind taking back a passenger in their boat. They were going just as soon as they 'd settled matters with Captain Seilberg.

"Vell, *I* von't keep you," says the great man cavalierly, shutting up the spy-glass with a snap. "Dat 's not de *Trush*, Got dammer!" and he turned testily away. Mr. Christianson followed with words about rebate on "damaged cans." Mr. Björk followed Mr. Christianson, deaf to Cheviot's questions about Mar, eyes fixed in glassy abstraction on the red-brown scoriæ under foot.

The two "Scandahoojians" and their passenger left St. Michaels the next day in the little sail-boat *St. Olaf*, managed with no small skill by Mr. Björk. It was the rugged Christianson, however, who issued the orders, and strangely enough, considering his aspect, supplied the social element and the information. If you saw Christianson alone, you would have thought him one of the grimmest works of God, but seeing him beside Björk you would find him almost genial.

What chiefly occupied Cheviot, as the *St. Olaf* sped through the windy drizzle, was a growing wonder as to how Hildegarde's father had come to be stranded up here all these months, and how a man accustomed to creature comforts, a cripple, and close on sixty—how had he endured the conditions of life at "Golovin!" What *were* the conditions at Golovin? Curious to know, for Hildegarde would ask—afraid to know, for Hilde-

garde must be answered, he kept seeing in flashes and as through the eyes of a girl, all the probable harshness of the old man's adventure.

Cheviot's questions about Golovin were interrupted by Mr. Christianson somewhat narrowly—eliciting an account of how the mission prospered; what the native population was; how many were converts; and other matters not strictly to the point Cheviot had in mind.

"Yes, *oh,* yes! Dere is great acti-*vitty.* You can see in our reports. Ve make great progress. Ve bring de true light to many who sat in darkness. But ve arre poore—meezerabble poore. Nobody knows, what haf not lief dere, how harrd de life. Eh, Björk?"

Björk, sheet in hand, gloomily assented, without the aid of speech.

Cheviot caught his glancing eye. "Are you—a—a—at the mission, too?"

The dark man studied the course and held on his silent way.

"Oh, yes. Mr. Björk ees von of os. He is not long dere—but he understand. Ve haf great need of vorkers. So he come."

"You mean you sent home for Mr. Björk?"

Mr. Christianson stared a moment. "Send home? Oh, it is far to Sveden. Heaven is nearer."

It was Cheviot's turn for mystification.

"Vhen ve need helpers," Mr. Christianson explained, "ve pray for dem. God send os Mr. Björk."

He spoke with a curious matter-of-factness.

"Oh," said Cheviot, "and—a—how did Mr. Björk know where to find you?"

"He see Kwimkuk in a visshun. He see de Mission House and he see me, too. Eh, Björk."

The helper nodded with preternatural gravity.

"Where were you," said Cheviot, "when you had the vision?"

"On board a whaler. Dat 's where Björk was," proudly Christianson answered for him. "On de whaler up in Grantley Harbor, vhile I am down dere at Kwimkuk praying for help."

"But how could he leave his ship?"

"Leedle boat," said Christianson, laconic for once.

"Oh, the captain let him off?"

Christianson shook his pale locks. "You do not know vhat dey are—dose whaling captains."

"You don't mean"—in his astonishment Cheviot addressed the dumb navigator again, as if given such a theme even he must at last find tongue—"you don't mean you," and then he halted, for there is something about the impact of the word "deserted" that men shy from, "you don't mean you left the ship without leave?" Björk's face never changed.

But not so Christianson's. He regarded his acolyte with a somber enthusiasm. "It was yoost like Björk. Say noddind. Yoost follow de call. Dat 's Björk!"

"Pretty big risk, I should have thought."

At which, somewhat to Cheviot's surprise, Björk gave a sharp little nod and Christianson showed his long yellow teeth in a rather horrible smile.

Cheviot felt egged on to say, "Don't they shoot deserters up here?"

"*Yes!*" said Björk, speaking for the first time.

"If dey find dem," amended Christianson.

Björk's little eyes glittered. His thin lips moved faintly, as if they, too, would have smiled had they ever learned the trick of it.

"And you came straight to Kwimkuk?" persisted Cheviot.

"No, he land oop by Sinook," Christianson said. "He see dat not de place he vas shown in de visshun, and dose whaler fellows after him de next day. Björk hide in de scrub villow, and creep along vid hands and knees. After two days he come to a native camp. Next morning he see out dere dat *Seagull* comin'. But he haf anodder visshun. He know now he haf to get a squaw to hide him in de bottom ob a kyak, and take him like dat down de coast to Golovin. Terrible long journey! I am down dere on de shore, when de squaw beach de boat. I see Björk crawl out de hole in de middle, half dead, and look round. Look all round. Den I hear him say in Svedish, 'Dis de place!' and I say, 'Vad Plads?' leedle surprised, and he come right away up to me, and he say 'De Lord sent me.' So I see he vas de man I pray for."

"Oh! And when he is n't managing a boat—up at the mission, what does Mr. Björk do?"

"Oh, he help," said Christianson, with unshakable satisfaction in the answer to his prayer. "Better as anybody he can preach."

"*Preach?*" echoed Cheviot, not believing his ears.

"Yes, Björk not talk *mooch,* except vhen he is in de pulpit or vhen he haf a refelation."

Well, they were odd Hausgenossen for Hildegarde's father! "How long had Mr. Mar been with them," Cheviot asked. Ten or eleven months. He had got to St. Michaels too late last year to reach the Klondike. He

just had time to go and take a look at Golovin Bay, when the winter overtook him at Kwimkuk. So he stayed there.

But this summer? Well, he was taken ill just about the time the ice went out of the bay—no, no, he was all right now. Mrs. Christianson had nursed him. Christianson did n't know what Mar's plans were—doubted if anybody did; though he was laying in supplies for some sort of excursion. He once had an idea of going all the way to Teller Station to see the Government reindeer. That was Mar's stuff, there, in the boat. Of course it was little use now to go to the Klondike. Besides, what incentive had a man of that age to face the hardships of prospecting in the arctic? It was no matter if such a man had not great fortune. He would n't know how to use it. He had not. Mr. Christianson was sorry to say it, but Mr. Mar had not the true light.

From which Cheviot gathered that Mr. Mar had not contributed all he might to the cause of Righteousness. But it was a relief to know that he had not been in straits. "He seem to haf blenty to bay his bills"—so why had he come up there, caring neither for money nor for missions? Here Cheviot caught the momentary gleam in Björk's little eyes. A question in them, but unspoken, like all else that went on in the close-cropped bullet head. Cheviot became aware that his old friend had somehow succeeded in making himself an object of intense curiosity to these queer folk.

They liked Mr. Mar, though—Christianson tried to catch Björk's eye, but the dark one declined confederacy—though Mr. Mar had done something a little while ago that made a great deal of trouble.

"Hein? Vell, it vas like dis. Von of our great deeficoolty is de vitchcraftiness of de natives. Not a season go by vidout dey have to tie up some von." He pursed his wrinkled lips and slowly shook his colorless locks.

"Oh!" said Cheviot, feeling his way. "How long do they keep them tied up?"

"Till dey confesses, or till dey dies."

There was need then of the missionary in this savage place, where Hildegarde's father had had to spend a year of his life.

"And if they confess, it 's all right, is it?" asked Cheviot.

"If dey confess, and if dey go and get a piece of de fur, or vhatever it is, dat dey 've cut off de clo'es of de person dey been vitching, and if dey give it back, and promise 'never again.'"

"And then they 're forgiven?"

"Yes. Sometimes dey 're stoned, sometimes dey 're yoost spit at and den let to vander avay—but dey 're forgiven."

"Oh, like that? Well, I wonder they trouble to confess."

"Dey like it better dan to be dead."

"Dead?"

"Burnt."

"Really? They went as far as that? But now, you mission people, I suppose, have put a stop to such goings on!"

"Ve are not greater at Kwimkuk dan Saul at Endor."

Cheviot stared.

"But Mr. Mar," the missionary went on, "he vill be viser dan de Prophets. He tink dere are no more any

vitches. Not even vhen he see dat Yakutat girl dey call Omilik—not even vhen he see vhat she have done. But von day Mr. Mar hear some noise, and he go down to de beach, and he see de girl tied to de tall stone ve fastens our boats to. He see dey been beating her, and now dey pile up de driftwood round, and he, not understanding'' —the missionary explained, with an air of forbearance— ''he, not understanding, he try to interfere. Dey very mad of course. Dey send for me. I tell Mr. Mar I *know* dis girl have vitched a baby and two men. De vomen all know it—everybody but Mr. Mar know it quite vell. Mr. Mar get very oxcited and say he not believe it. Dey bring de baby; he say, 'Dat a sick baby, anyhow.' He not understand at all. Dey go on vid making de fire. Mr. Mar yoost goin' to do someting foolish, vhen de girl cry out, 'I confess. Yes, yes, I do all dem tings!' 'Dere, you *see!*' I tell Mr. Mar. So dey make de vitch go and bring de little pieces vhat she cut off de baby coat, and off de men's clo'es for to vitch dem vid. Dey all holla vhen dey see dose tings. All but Mr. Mar. He say de natives dey all done dat; dey all steals pieces off everybody in the settlemint; cause dey so 'fraid anybody get sick, dey be called vitches; and if dey not got any pieces to give up, dey know dey shall be burnt. 'So dey all keeps plenty 'gainst de evil day,' says Mr. Mar.

''He mek so great foos, I tell dem yoost to tie de girl so she not wriggle out, and leave her dere like dey done Chuchuk last year. So dey does dat. Ve all goes avay.

''Von day and night. Two day and night. Tree day and night. Dat girl yoost de same. Dey cooms to me and says, 'Somebody gif dat vitch to eat.' I say nobody vill do a ting like dat. Dey say dey sure. Next

night dey vatch. Dey see Mr. Mar go down vid bread and vater. You can tink dey are mad. It is good I am dere. I say, 'Vait! I vill talk vid Mr. Mar.' I do dat."

His faded white-lashed eyes grew sterner still as he recalled the interview.

"Well, what happened?"

"It vas for me a moment of great responsibeeleetee. De more ve talk, de more I see it ees for Mr. Mar a matter of sentiment. *No!* of *nairves!* For os it ees a matter of religion. Ve live vid dose people. Ve teach dem. Ve feed dem in time of famine. Ve nurse dem ven dey are sick. But ven dey do vat the Yakutat voman haf done—"

His low, booming voice went out across the surf, leaving behind a trail of menace like the deadened roll of a distant gun.

"What then?"

Cheviot's eyes were held by the fiery look on the rugged face. Impossible to doubt the burning sincerity that gave its ugliness that moment of almost uncanny power.

"Mr. Mar see it no good to say dere is no more any vitches vid dat Yakutat voman at our door. So he say ve shall not be crool even to a vitch. Den I tell him, 'A man also or a voman dat haf a familiar spirit or dat is a vizard shall surely be put to death; dey shall stone dem vid stones; dere blood shall be upon dem. For all dat do dese tings are an abomination unto de Lord.' "

After a silence, "What did he say to that?" Cheviot asked.

"Hein—hn—hn!" Christianson shook back the square cut hanks of tow that fell from under his hat.

"Not even Mr. Mar," he said, with an air of triumph, "not even Mr. Mar talk back to Moses!"

But the good man's satisfaction seemed short-lived. He was grave enough as he went on, "Big storm in de night. Next day no vitch dere." He waved a great bony hand toward Kamchatka.

"Vitch gone off vid de vind."

Then, lowering his voice as though out there in the sea hollows listeners might be lurking, he bent forward: "If dey vas to know Mr. Mar go down in de storm, and cut de raw hide for let dat vitch go!—" Again, with grim foreboding, he shook the hanks of tow.

"Ve all like your friend, but ve sorry see any yentleman tink he know better as de Bible."

CHAPTER X

CHEVIOT found Hildegarde's father practically a prisoner.

His board and lodging had been too welcome a source of revenue to the mission for Christianson to feel called upon to smooth the way for his departure, and Mar had been some time in grasping the fact that his plan of hiring a boat and a couple of natives to go up the coast for a "look at the country," was hopelessly knocked on the head since his interference in the matter of the Yakutat witch. Not a native in the community who felt safe with him since that episode. The lame man was in league with the powers of darkness.

Mar's pleasure at seeing Cheviot was genuine, but not as unmeasured as you might expect. And when, almost before the first shower of questions and answers had begun to abate, Cheviot flung in information as to when the next ship was leaving St. Michaels, Mar assumed the subject to be of interest only to Cheviot. Pressed further about his own plans, the elder man said evasively they were not very settled, and changed the subject! Cheviot was nonplussed. Was Mar only waiting till they were clear of the Mission House? No, for they were out fishing the whole of the next day, and most of the days following, and still Mar talked of any and everything save of going home. Was he waiting for funds? Surely

not now that Cheviot was at hand. He seemed inexplicably satisfied to sit all day over a trout pool up the river (despite the pestilential mosquito), or in a boat in the bay fishing for tom-cod; and all the evening playing chess in the bare mission parlor, in the midst of a company sufficiently singular. Shady fellows from the Galena camp above White mountain; prospectors expelled from Cook's Inlet, lousy, filthy-smelling natives come upon one pretext or another, weird missionaries dropped down from places no man but themselves seemed ever to have heard of; a reindeer-herder in the Government service, though a "Scandahoojian," like the majority at the Golovin Mission, and highly welcome albeit hardly on the score of his piety. For "Hjalmar," as Christianson called him, was the one who jibed most at the morning and evening prayers, and particularly at the long grace before meat, with its delicate proposals to the Almighty that He should induce those present to save their souls by giving to the Golovin Mission. With the same breath that thanked Him for "dis dy bounty," the Omnipotent was reminded that if this agreeable state of things was to continue, people must pay not only for the meal, but for the Cause.

Mar listened, or did n't listen, with an air of respectful quiescence, and ate his meals unabashed. But he commiserated Cheviot, "How this must make you long for your Valdivia luxuries. Well, when do you go back?"

"Whenever you 're ready."

Mar showed as little gratitude as pleasure.

"You must n't think of waiting for me," he answered shortly.

Cheviot was profoundly perplexed as to what he ought to do. Mar was not a man that any one could comfortably catechize, but to go away and leave him here with public opinion so against him; for Cheviot to present himself to Hildegarde, knowing he had left her father on this inhospitable shore, to all intents and purposes a prisoner—it was not to be thought of.

Mar's favorite scheme for a good day's fishing was to row across to the river mouth where some Englishmen, several years before, had made a camp.

In the sheltered hollow a little way up the stream they had built a cabin, so well, that although long deserted it still offered refuge from the drenching rain, or from the unshut eye of the sun, and even from the greater torment of mosquitoes. For Mar had learnt the value of the Esquimau use of a "smudge." On the way to the cabin he would gather two handfuls of arctic moss, of straw and some aromatic smelling herb, twist all together in two wisps and set one alight on the flat stone that formed the threshold and the other smoldering in a rusty pan upon the sill of the single window, with the result that the mosquitoes fled. In great comfort Mar and Cheviot would proceed to make tea, and eat their sandwiches—at least, Cheviot ate his. He noticed that although his friend never disposed of a third of what he brought, he did not the next time bring any less. Quite suddenly one day it dawned upon Cheviot why. For although the crackers and cheese and sandwiches that were left were always carefully put away in a tin cracker-box, the box on their return was invariably empty.

And Mar never seemed the least surprised.

Was it that he could not bring himself to abandon the poor wretch he had rescued; could that be at the root of his delay? But why did he not take Cheviot into his confidence and get the girl out of the country if she were in hiding hereabouts? Was it conceivable that Mar—

Cheviot got little further in his speculations till the morning when Mar, in the act of making a cast, said under his breath and without moving a muscle, "There 's that fellow again!"

Cheviot turned just in time to see Björk's head disappear behind a bunch of tall reeds that grew in the hollow by the little fresh water stream below the cabin. "What 's he lurking about like that for?"

"I 'm afraid he 's on the track of a poor, wretched girl," and Mar told the story of the Yakutat witch, but with additions not creditable to Mr. Björk.

"It 's usually an old woman, here as elsewhere, that 's accused and set upon, but this girl can't be above seventeen, for she had n't been long out of the Bride's House."

"The what?"

"Oh, the horrible igloo where they confine the marriageable girls for half a year. They stay in there, in the dark all that time, never seeing the face of man; and they come out cowed, and fat, and pallid; and then they 're for sale as wives. Those that no man takes are looked down upon, and left to shift for themselves and must earn their own living. The Yakutat girl was pounced on instantly by a man she hated for some reason. He took her off, but she escaped and made her way to the mission. Nobody was at home at the time but Björk and me. I saw her come in, and I saw her come flying out of the mission parlor wilder even than she 'd entered it,

and go tearing down to the village. She found shelter there, for a while, with the woman who had brought her up. But public opinion was all against her; and when it was found that the reason her 'husband,' Peddykowchee, did n't come and get her, was that he was ill, they said she had bewitched him. His younger brother said she 'd done the same to him, and then a miserable little baby—oh, it was a ghastly business. 'Sh—" and Mar fished in silence for a full hour, with occasional sharp glances through the alder thicket behind him, down among the reeds by the deserted cabin.

The next day the store left in the cracker-box was found to be untouched.

"She 's seen Björk!" said Mar under his breath. "She 's afraid to come any more."

"Why don't you help her to get out of the country?" Cheviot asked, setting alight the smudge on the window-sill.

"I was planning that when you came, but I don't want to mix you up in any such ticklish business."

"It 's no more ticklish for me than for you."

"Oh, I 'm blown upon already. The people here have been red hot about it. They have n't cooled down yet."

"They never will," said Cheviot.

"No," agreed Mar, "but I 've made the cause mine, you see. After you 're gone—"

"I 'm not going till you do."

"That 's nonsense."

"If you like," said Cheviot.

"It 's on account of that letter of Hildegarde's?"

"Whatever the reason is, I 'm going to stay if you are, and you may as well let me in for my share of the fun."

"Your 'share!'" repeated Mar reflectively, and stroked his long gray mustache.

"I was arranging to get the girl away," he went on presently, "when you came. I had bought this boat and made a habit of being out all day."

"Exactly! All we need is provisions."

"No, I sent Christianson to St. Michaels for provisions. They 're at the mission now."

"Of course, we brought them up with us! Then we 've nothing to do but to get the stuff into the boat."

"Without exciting suspicion."

"And pick the girl up somewhere on the coast."

"—before they realize we 're gone for good."

"Surely you and I could start off on an excursion together without exciting suspicion. Why, you told them when you first came, you were going up the coast, 'to have a look at the country,'" he added, remembering Christianson's phrase.

Mar studied him an instant with uncommon intentness.

"What is it?" laughed Cheviot. "You look as if you could n't make up your mind to trust me."

"No, I 'm making up my mind I will." Again he paused for a moment, and then, "I am too old to do the thing alone," he said.

"Well, I can manage the boat, anyhow."

"Oh, the girl can row as well as a man, but I must have a partner." And sitting there in the deserted cabin Nathaniel Mar, for the last time, told how a hundred and odd miles further up the coast he had panned out gold with a dead man's help when he himself was young.

And when he had said it, that thing befell him that overtook any enthusiast in talking to Louis Cheviot. Mar saw his story on a sudden in a comic light. Clear now, its relationship to twenty "tall stories," fit matter for a twitch of the humorous lip, a hitch of the judicial shoulder.

The unconscious Cheviot had choked off many a confidence just by that look of cool amusement.

"I 've always said," Mar wound up, preparing hastily to withdraw again into his shell, "I 've always said it would 'keep,' and it *has* kept close on thirty years."

"Well, it won't keep much longer," said Cheviot briskly.

"Why not?" A tremor shot through the man with the secret.

"Why? Because it 's in the air."

Mar clasped and unclasped his big walking-stick as if about to rise.

"Before another year," Cheviot went on, "the whole of Alaska will swarm with prospectors."

"Do you think so?"

"Sure. Why, it 's begun. I don't believe there 's a single Yukon tributary where there is n't a man wandering about this minute with a shovel and a pan."

"The Yukon! Well, that 's a good way to the south!"

"Those men that stopped at the mission last night—they were miners."

"They—they were after galena!" said Mar, almost angrily. "They knew that fairly good ore had been brought down Fish River off and on since '81."

Cheviot laughed. "Well, if you imagine they won't so much as look for gold, let 's smuggle your witch to

St. Michaels and take the first steamer home. *I 've* had enough of the North."

"You say that because you don't really believe I 've discovered a second Klondike."

"Why should n't I believe it? And have n't I turned my back on the Klondike we all know exists?"

"Those men that came to the mission yesterday," Mar said hurriedly, "they—they were going to Fish River, were n't they? Not—not up the coast?"

"No, no, that 's all right," Cheviot reassured him. "All I meant was that somebody hereabouts had only to whisper 'Gold!' for this whole country to swarm."

"I know—I know. But we 'll have the start, Cheviot."

Mar pulled himself up by the aid of his stick, and dragged the rude soap box table out of its shady corner, into the light nearer the window, a light but little obscured by the faint smoke wreaths that curled about the pan and sent abroad a slightly pungent breath, agreeably acrid, except to the summer pest. Mar's excitement found little expression in his face, but, so to speak, came out at his finger tips. He could hardly hold the piece of paper he had pulled from his pocket. Up to ten minutes ago he had felt almost as far from his ancient purpose as though he still sat on the high stool in the inner room of the Valdivia bank. Now, and within the last few seconds more especially, fulfilment seemed breathlessly near. Sitting on one side of the soap box, with Cheviot opposite, Mar traced on the back of an envelop the land-locked inner Bay of Golovin, the outer bay, and from Rocky Point a broken line on up the coast.

"This," he said, shading a little strip bordering the

shore, "this is the sand-spit where I found the Esquimau camp. Here 's the crooked river, with its mouth full of wood. Only six or seven miles to the north is the anvil-shaped mountain."

The two men, bending low over the soiled envelop, were too absorbed to notice the glitter just above the window-sill; eyes narrowed to evade the smoke; two mere points of light to the right of the rusty pan with its haze of smoldering incense.

Mar's pencil whispered over the paper in the silence.

Then he spoke. "From this broken range on the north three or four streams come trickling down to the coast. The one on the west here winds round from the north side of the Anvil, and it was just at this point, as I remember—just here," and the pencil shook as if in doubt, or refusing to commit itself, till Mar planted the point so firmly on the paper it made a dent as well as a mark. *"Just here I found the gold."*

When finally Cheviot raised his eyes the glitter was gone from the sill.

While the two in the cabin laid their plans and made a list of provisions and requirements, a man was creeping on hands and knees, through willow scrub and reeds, down to the boat that lay moored in the cove below the cabin.

Christianson sat talking to Hjalmar the herder, of the Government project of introducing reindeer among the Alaskan natives, when the door of the private office was flung wide. They looked round and saw Björk standing there.

On the sallow mask a strange light shining. The hard

lips twitched in a recurrent rictus, showing a dog-like gleam of sharp eye-tooth, while the rest of the mouth held rigid. If the tremendous force that locked the lean jaws was lost upon the onlooker, it must have been the insane light in Björk's eyes that made the reindeer-herder whisper, "He 's got a fit."

But Christianson had only flung back his long, straight hair, and grasped the rude arms of his big chair.

"Björk," he said, "iss it a visshun?"

"Ye—h—h!" Björk answered through shut teeth. An instant longer he stood silent, with his hairy hands clenched, and a barely perceptible forward and backward swaying of the tense body. Then, with an effort as of forcing steel to part, he opened his welded lips and said rapidly in Swedish, "Have we not fed the hungry?"

"Aye," said Christianson.

"Have we not nursed the sick? Have we not preached the Gospel to every creature?"

"Aye, aye," from Christianson.

"Have we not kept the law?" With each question nearer and nearer Björk brought the black menace of his face.

"Have we not had the faith that moveth mountains? Have we not served in hardship? Have we not waited in poverty till this hour?"

"*Till* this hour?" said Christianson, getting up slowly out of his chair.

Björk arrested his own dreamlike advance with a suddenness that seemed to wake him. He stopped, looked round, and clutched at the back of a chair.

"Shut the door," he commanded.

His chief obeyed. When Christianson turned round

again, Björk was staring over the reindeer-herder's head, piercing the infinite depths of space, while he held tight to every-day existence by the back of a chair.

"Brethren," he said, "the angel of the Lord has been with me. He has shown me great riches."

Hjalmar the herder pulled himself together and shook off his growing nervousness. There was nothing uncanny in this after all. A vision of riches was only too common since the Klondike had crazed men's brains. Björk saw that even Christianson looked less moved.

"I tell you," the seer burst out, "this is the answer to all our prayer, the reward of all our work. The angel took me westward up the coast. I see it now!" He unlocked his clutching hands, raised them outstretched on a level with his eyes and with hypnotic slowness moved the right hand east, the left one west.

"A sand-spit," he said, "where the heathen gather. Beyond—a flat country, where no tree grows. But the river mouth is choked with sea-drift. A strange shaped hill. One of old Thor's workshops. Where *he* hammered the sword of the gods, *we* shall forge weapons against the ungodly. Weapons of gold. For the river of that country—the angel showed me the sands of it! And the sands, Christianson, the sands were full of gold!"

The herder looked at Christianson and Christianson looked at the herder. The herder shook his head.

Christianson sat down again in his great chair.

"I tell you," said Björk solemnly, "I see that 'promised land' plainer than ever I saw Kwimkuk. Plainer"—he raised his voice—"than I see you two."

But he saw them very plainly. His look leaped from one face to the other, and rage gathered on his own.

"You sit there like stone. You are deaf. You are like dead men. I—I—" He looked about the room wildly as if he had forgotten where the door was. "I would go alone, but I must have provisions. I must have help with the boat—help with the—"

"Y—yes, yes," stuttered the old missionary.

"And the angel said, 'Go first to Christianson.'"

"Yes, yes. Of course, I—"

"'But tarry not,' said the voice. 'If Christianson receive not the good tidings, go take the news to another.'" He seemed now to locate the door. He made two steps in that direction, saying, "Me—I obey the voice."

"I, too, obey," said Christianson hurriedly. "I will come Saturday."

"*Saturday!*" Björk's burning impatience blew the end of the week to the end of the world. "I tell you *to-morrow* will be too late! It must be to-day. It must be this hour."

"Why?" demanded the herder, but he, too, was on his feet.

"Ha! You will ask questions! No wonder the angel comes to me." Again he turned about and rushed at the door. Christianson intercepted him. Björk, with a convulsive movement, flung him off.

"The voice said, 'This is the hour you have prayed for, but if it passes in idleness, pray no more—*pray no more!*'" Björk's voice rang out with a tragic authority. "'For this is the hour when your feet should be shod with swiftness and your hands be full of cunning.' It was the voice said so." Björk's fingers were on the latch. "Me—I obey." He opened the door.

"Come, Hjalmar," said Christianson.

"'Brethren,' he said, 'the angel of the Lord has been with me. He has shown me great riches'"

CHAPTER XI

HILDEGARDE'S sense of anxious responsibility had grown with every month that passed after her father sailed out of San Francisco harbor. Bound for—"the Klondike!" people exclaimed with envy, rather than asked in any doubt.

"No—no," he had said, and then hastily—to keep outsiders off the track—"well, perhaps. Who knows?" Who *did n't* know! And, after all, why should any man stay at home who was n't obliged?

It was natural that no one else should take Mr. Mar's enterprise as seriously from the start as did his daughter. For she knew how large had been her share in it. She had been the first, the only one, to cheer him on. She it was who had got "the boys" to finance the undertaking. She who had broken the fact to her mother. But for his daughter, Nathaniel Mar would not now be—where was he? How faring? Many a time Hildegarde's heart contracted sharply, as in silence she framed the question. Her own fault that she could n't answer—her fault that half Valdivia could no longer set their clocks by the big, lame man's passing—her doing that he sat no more of a morning in the warm, sunny room of the San Joaquin, sending out smoke and absorbing news. Others sat there in peace and safety, discussing their absent townsman;

and Hildegarde sat at home trying to keep at bay the thought: if anything dreadful should happen to him!

It had eased her a little to write to Cheviot, and beg him to look out for her father. She was tempted to say, "Bring him back safe and there 's nothing I won't gladly do to prove—" But she had pulled herself up in time, and only promised an unending gratitude.

The steamer *President,* which had taken Mar north, brought on her return trip a brief letter from him, saying merely that the journey was safely accomplished as far as St. Michaels. His family knew they would probably not hear again till the following summer.

Life was easier when Bella was there. To her one might say, "Will he come back by the first boat in June, or shall we only have letters, do you think?" And say it in one form or another so often that, but for reasons unavowed, the speculation would have wearied friendship.

But Bella was full of sympathy and tonic suggestion, always prepared to pore over northern maps, always ready to discuss probable conditions "up there."

What a friend was Bella! "I 've *talked* of a standard," Hildegarde thought humbly, "but she lives up to it—in these days." It was a shame ever to remember the lapses long ago.

And how intelligent she was! How curiously well informed! But Bella was always surprising you.

"I keep thinking about him in the night. I lie awake wondering if he 's cold," Hildegarde confessed, and Bella, why, to look at her face you 'd think she knew all about that lying awake and wondering—did the same herself. "Father does so love a fire. Don't you remem-

ber when all of us would be baking he used to draw closer to the hearth?''

''That was only because he lived so much indoors. He 'll be *quite* warm in that beautiful furry sleeping-bag. He 'll probably sleep better than he 's done since he was a child. They all do.''

''Who do?''

''Oh—a—people who—go to the Klondike.''

Another time, ''I am haunted by the certainty that he did n't take enough provisions. Trenn says that in intense cold people eat a great deal more than—''

''That 's true,'' said Bella sagely, ''but it 'll be all right. People are very good to one another in such out-of-the-way places. They always share with anybody who runs short.''

''How do you know?''

''Well, that 's what the accounts all say.''

''What accounts?''

''Oh, in the—the papers.''

''I never see any such accounts. It 's all horrors—freezing and starving to death. Besides, father will be the one to do the sharing and then have to go without. Oh, *why* did I help him to—''

''Don't be absurd,'' Bella said, almost angrily. ''In any case *he 's* not gone beyond the reach of supply depots.'' Neither met the other's eye.

''But suppose his money gives out—it will give out if it 's true they charge two dollars for a potato. He never could keep any money in his pockets. Oh, it 's all very well for you, *your* father is n't sitting on an iceberg starving to death.''

A queer look came into Bella's little face. It was

there, now and then, and gone like a ghost, leaving a troubled tenderness behind.

"It 's not as if he were near a settlement, as the Klondikers are to Dawson City," Hildegarde went on, yearning for reassurance. "The place father was going to is quite uninhabited, except by a few Esquimaux. Often I can hardly eat for thinking—thinking"—her voice caught—"maybe he is hungry."

"That 's impossible. He 's much too sensible and clever."

"What good is it to be sensible and clever if you 've got nothing to eat?"

"But being sensible and clever will help him to find things to eat."

"How do you make that out?"

"Oh, as far south as that—"

As far *south?* Was she out of her mind?

"There are plenty of ptarmigan and rabbits and things, where Mr. Mar is."

"Are there? But he 's lame. How can he go shooting—"

"Other people can, especially the natives, and you may be sure your father will have his share. Besides, he 'll fish. Mr. Mar 'll like that part of it."

"How *can* you be so heartless!"

"What do you mean?"

"How is my father to fish in rivers frozen hard as iron?"

"Through holes in the ice, of course!" Bella defended the idea warmly. "You 'll see," she spoke as if she 'd personally tested the efficacy of the device; "you 'll see they 'll get fish all winter that way."

"How *do* you know? Now don't say you get it out of the newspapers, for I never see these things, and I look for nothing else."

"No, I found that in a book."

"What book?"

It turned out to be a two-year-old volume upon Arctic Exploration. On the fly-leaf Bella's name and the date, 1896. A whole year before Cheviot went to the Klondike, or Mr. Mar to Alaska. The year that—

The light that had glimmered broke in a flood.

"Let us read it together, Bella," said Hildegarde softly.

"No, there 's a newer one I 've just sent for. We 'll read that if you like."

They finished it at the Waynes' country place. "I wish," said Hildegarde, "we had another book about—"

"There are plenty more." Bella unlocked a little chest. It was full of nothing but books, and the books were about nothing but arctic life and exploration. For nearly two years, Bella had been buying and reading everything she could hear of published on the subject in America or Europe.

Hildegarde hung above the store. "We must go through them all together. It is the most fascinating reading in the world."

"It is the most horrible in the world. The most ghastly, it makes you ill. But, yes; I agree with you one can't *not know.*"

They read the books together. Even the honest-hearted Hildegarde, who began with her father agonizingly present in her mind, abandoned him presently to his probably less terrible fate, and pushed forward with

strange men on their farther journey; fitting each new fortune or mischance to the One on the other side of the world, never mentioned either by her or Bella. Though Hildegarde kept her oath not to speak Galbraith's name, she felt a strange new excitement now in saying "He" as for her father, yet thinking of the One who had gone farther afield even than Cheviot, and much, much farther than Mr. Mar. Each girl played with the ruse. It gave to reading and speculation a subtilty—a spirit—that never flagged.

And now spring was here. Although still far too early for such forecasting, both felt the need of returning to Valdivia, to be within easier reach of papers, of telegrams, and of returning travelers. For all the world knew when once the spring was come up yonder, the summer followed hard. How natural it was to be looking forward to something great and wonderful that was to happen in June! Hildegarde and her father had done that as long ago as when the girl was in her early teens and Jack Galbraith expected back from his first arctic enterprise. What more natural than that Hildegarde and Bella should be doing very much the same to-day. To call their expectation by Mar's name, merely gave it manageability. For, apart from Bella's interdiction, the word "Galbraith" was, in this, like a hot iron. If it were to be touched in safety, some shield must come between you and the too ardent metal. "Galbraith" would scorch. But wrap "Mar" about the forbidden name, and you could use it to significant ends.

Summer and Mr. Mar! Oh, Mr. Mar served well as symbol of that mightier issue, that both dared hope for out of this year's opening of the ice gates of the North.

And yet the month of wonder, June, went by without a word or a sign coming down from the top of the world.

July brought a letter from the Klondike—Cheviot's second. He had done well, and he was coming home. Hildegarde might look to see him by the next boat. No word of Mar; plain he had n't had Hildegarde's news when he wrote. Not the next boat, however, nor the next, brought Cheviot, nor any word of Mr. Mar.

"I don't know how I should get through this time but for you, Bella." Hildegarde and she were seldom apart.

Not till mid-August came the sign from Mar, a letter written from a queer-sounding place in early June, a letter strangely short and non-committal. He had reached St. Michaels too late the previous autumn to go any further than Golovin Bay, before navigation closed. He would push on as soon as travel was practicable. He was well. He sent his love. And no more that summer. No more up to the time the boats stopped running in the autumn.

Cheviot had not come after all. And silence, like the silence of the grave, wrapt the fate of that Other, on the far side of the world.

"I shall burn a joss to those who travel by land or by sea, by snow or by ice," said Bella, one day in December, and she lit the stick of incense on the flower altar, whence no heathen smoke of prayer had risen for a couple of years now. But more prayers than ever before had been offered up in the little white room. And what need of a face on the wall above the roses? The picture was not really shut away in a drawer. Vivid in each girl's mind, it was borne about as faithfully, as in the

old days, when on Hildegarde's breast in a setting of silver it hung on a velvet string.

Now and then Bella remembered Cheviot, and when she remembered him, she spoke of him. Sometimes she spoke of him when she was thinking of him little enough. As on the night when she was n't well, and Hildegarde, sleeping on the sofa in her friend's room, had waked in misery over a dream she 'd had. Bella was lying wide-eyed in the dark, "A dream about— ?"

"Yes," Hildegarde said hurriedly, "a snow-storm in the night, in the wind; a slipping down into blackness. I thought I saw him fall, and I knew it was the end."

"They go by contraries. Your father 's quite well and happy." Hildegarde had not said the dream concerned her father, but she offered no correction.

"Still," Bella went on, "for the moment it makes one feel—I 'll tell you! we must have a little light to comfort us."

"No, no; it will hurt my eyes," Hildegarde was surreptitiously crying. But Bella was already up, and before Hildegarde could forestall her, she had opened the door across the hall leading into the opposite room, and there she was striking a light. Hildegarde followed her, still a little dazed by the vivid horror of the dream, and when her eyes fell upon her own little white bed, she flung herself down there, and buried her face in the cool pillow.

"You are n't crying, are you, Hildegarde, over a silly dream? Look here, I 'm lighting a joss for Mr. Mar."

A little silence.

"I 've lit another," said Bella's hurried voice, still over there by the table, "one for Louis." Hildegarde,

with face half-hidden, imagined rather than saw, that three slender smoke feathers were curling above the flowers, drowning the meeker fragrance of the roses.

She lay there feeling the oppression of the dream fading, and a waking oppression take its place. Yes, they "went by contraries." Galbraith had n't fallen and been swallowed in the gaping maw of a crevasse; but when he came back, what was going to happen? He belonged to Bella. But he had left Bella. And he had belonged first of all to Hildegarde. What would befall friendship in that coming wrench!

"Go back to bed, Bella; you 'll be worse."

"You must come, too."

Hildegarde made no answer.

"You can't lie there with all these flowers in the room. I did n't know you had n't set them out. The doors can't be left open either."

"The windows can."

"I shan't go unless you come, too."

Hildegarde forced herself to get up. Bella put out the comforting light. But some things show plainer in the dark. Those symbols on the altar, they were only tendrils of smoke by day, or in the glare of gas. Now they were sparks of fire puncturing the blackness of the scented room. One fiery eye to watch over the fortunes of Nathaniel Mar, one to shine for Cheviot, and an unnamed third to pierce the darkness that shrouded the fate of that Other. Even when the two girls turned their backs, and groped their way to Bella's room clinging hold of each other in the dark, the third spark not only shone before their inner vision still, it pricked each bosom with its point of fire.

What would happen when he came back?

Each wondered, and each held faster to the other with fear in the bottom of her heart.

Meanwhile, life outwardly went on pretty much the same. With Trenn and Harry, Eddie Cox and other swains, the girls went to parties and picnics, to concerts, and the theater, and did all the usual things. The one unusual thing those days brought was the Charles Trennor fancy ball. It was going to be a great affair, and Valdivia conversation for weeks had begun by some such statement as, "I 'm going as the Goddess of Liberty. What shall you be?"

Of course Trenn and Harry were coming up for the great occasion, and their costumes called for endless consultation with that great authority, Bella. They had, moreover, told their sister she might on this occasion be as glorious as ever she liked, and they would "foot the bill." Hildegarde deeply appreciated such generosity, but what was more to the point, did Bella?

She only said: "Yes, Hildegarde 's going to be glorious. But I don't think it 's the kind of glory you can buy."

Even before the Mar boys had come forward in this magnificent way, Bella had decided that Hildegarde must go as Brunhild. Her gown was to be white cloth. embroidered with silver dragons—strictly adapted from an ancient Norse design. She was to wear silver sandals on her feet; on one bare arm would be a buckler, a spear in her right hand, and on her fair hair a silver helmet.

Bella was going as Amy Robsart, and that was easy enough. It was those dragons of Hildegarde's that took

the time; and, as Bella had said, they would n't have been easy to buy. She and Hildegarde were embroidering them every spare minute, day and night. Even now, though almost, they were not quite done, which was a pity. Trenn and Harry were coming up from Siegel's again this evening—the excuse, the necessary inspection of Brunhild, at Bella's express invitation. For this had been the one costume not ready in time for the "dress-rehearsal" two nights before, when Bella and "the boys" had put on their Elizabethan finery, and peacocked about in great spirits.

"I want your brothers to be what they call 'knocked silly' when they first see you, Hildegarde. You must be all dressed and ready, and we can turn up the bottom of the skirt and work at that last dragon while we 're waiting."

In pursuance of this plan, the two girls had gone upstairs directly after supper, though it was hardly probable the boys could get there before half-past nine.

Mrs. Mar sat waiting for them in the parlor, on that side of the center table where the book rest supported an open volume. She rocked while she waited, and she crocheted while she rocked. At times she glanced at the clock—not once at the open book. Not for her own edification was the volume there, but for the enlargement of Hildegarde's literary horizon, while she and Bella stitched at silver dragons. But this latest choice in standard works had not pleased any one. Victor Hugo was much too fond of fiery love-scenes to prosper with Mrs. Mar, but the miserable man had become a classic, and after all, Hildegarde was old enough not to be infected. Bella—she read everything, the minx!

Although Hildegarde was in her twenty-fifth year, Mrs. Mar knew her so little, she felt no assurance that the girl would keep up her languages, or read "the best things" in any tongue, without her mother's dragging her by main force across the flowery fields of belles lettres—as though over stubble and through brake.

Listening to Mrs. Mar's reading of a classic was an experience of some singularity. For if she macerated descriptive bits with a chin-chopper despatch, to get them out of the way (not disguising the fact that she considered these passages in the light of the salutary self-torture that no disciplined life should evade, any more than vaccination or a visit to the dentist), she did far deadlier things to scenes of sentiment or passion. These she approached with a sturdy determination not to give in to their nonsense, to make them at all events *sound* like sanity by sheer force of her own impregnable common-sense—a force so little to be withstood, that it could purge the most poetic page ever written. It made even Victor Hugo sound as reasonable as the washing list. If you did n't inwardly curse or secretly weep, you must have laughed to see how effectually she could clip fancy's wings, slam the door on sentiment, bring high passion down to a sneaking shame, and effectually punish a great reputation. In short, listening to Mrs. Mar reading romance was so sure a way, not only to strip it bare of its traditional glory, but to rob it of every chance of "going home," that Hildegarde, as soon as she got wind of what was the next work to be attacked, hastened to borrow it of Bella, devoured it alone, and so got a first impression that could more or less hold its own against the maternal onslaught. It is but fair

to say that to any comedy passage Mrs. Mar gave excellent effect, and, by way of appreciation, a grim smile peculiarly her own; while for a spirited encounter between wits sharp and merciless, she had open approval.

"That 's something like!" she would say. "Old Dumas" (or whoever it might be), "he can do it when he likes!" and the great one was patted on the back: "*This* man 's going to live."

Bella had known that Mrs. Mar would sit in the half-light till even she could see no longer. But Hildegarde was not suffered to make her entrance in the dusk. Bella ran in first and "lit up." She did not stop to draw the blinds, she was in too great a hurry; besides, it was nice to let in the mild and beautiful night. "Now, Hildegarde! Look, Mrs. Mar," and Bella ushered in a living page from an old Icelandic Saga; "is n't she glorious?"

Mrs. Mar pecked at the regal figure with her hard, bright eyes, "White does n't make her any slimmer," she said.

"Oh, it would n't do for Brunhild to be a mean, little, narrow creature."

"That helmet, too! It makes her look ten feet high."

"She wants to look high!—*and* 'mighty!' and she does. No, no, stop Hildegarde, you *must n't* take it off."

"Just till we hear the boys coming. It—it 's—" Hildegarde contracted her broad brows under the helmet's weight.

But Bella flew to the rescue. "Don't, don't! Hands off! What does it matter if it *is* heavy? You must get used to it. You 've got to be a heroine!" she wound up severely, "so don't expect to be comfortable!" and

Bella pulled a chair under the drop-light. "Sit here where Trenn and Harry can see you the minute they open the door. Now we can go on with the last dragon while we 're waiting."

Mrs. Mar cleared her throat, " 'Acte Cinquième. La Noce.' " And the two girls, raising their eyes from the work, saw through the open window, in front of them, not the close-massed syringa underneath, nor the soft Californian night above, but "une terrasse du palais d'Aragon," in the town of Saragossa, four hundred years ago. And no sense visited them of any jarring contrast between the picture of the world in the yellow-backed book, and the picture of life as they knew it best. Thanks to the poet that lives in most young hearts, even Victor Hugo's gallant vision of a civilization that was old before California was discovered, brought no envious sense of the difference between then and now—rather a naïve surprise that those others so far away, so long ago, should have understood so well.

Older, more self-critical, they might have lost this sense of comradeship—might have gone over to the gray majority that insists only the past is picturesque, or that if any grace remains unto this day, it must needs be far removed from places we know well, precariously surviving under other skies, speaking an alien tongue. Those who would persuade us there is no scene in our every-day life but what is sordid, barren, or at best (and worst) meanly commonplace—stuff unfit for poetry or even for noble feeling—what do the carpers by such comment on our times but confess an intellect abject, slavish, blind. To find the beauty and the dignity that lie in the difficult familiar days that we ourselves are

battling through, to detect high courage in the common speech, to get glimpses of the deathless face of romance as we go about the common streets, is merely to know life as it is, and yet to walk the modern world as gloriously companioned as any Viking or Hidalgo of the past.

So true is early youth's apprehension of these things, that not even Mrs. Mar could make wide enough for envy or embarrassment the gulf in the two girls' minds between an Old World bandit chief, and a New World soldier of fortune. The transition, that to the sophisticated seems grotesque, between the Hernani of 1519 and the modern American pursuing perilous ways to the Pole—this feat was accomplished without misgiving, although in Saragossa, "on entend des fanfares éloignées," and in Valdivia an indefatigable woman, on the other side of the street, was strumming the old tune, renamed, "The Boulanger March"; and now Mrs. Mar was beginning Scene III with an air of cold distrust, that Bella foresaw would mount by well-known degrees to a climax of scorn.

The lady turned the page.

" 'Mon âme
Brûle—Eh! dis au volcan qu'il étouffe sa flamme,'—

"How long are they going on like this, I wonder?" she interrupted herself to durchblätter the pages.

" 'Ah! qui n'oublierait tout à cette voix céleste!' "

And more fingering of the leaves. "Four more solid pages of this sort of thing," she announced. "Well, if

the rest of the world has stood it, I suppose we must." And she went on—

"'Ta parole est un chant où rien d'humain ne reste—'"

And on, in a measured staccato, exactly as if she were adding up a column of figures, or telling off yards of tape.

"'Doña Sol.
Viens, ô mon jeune amant,
Dans mes bras.'"

Bella dropped the silver dragon, and with, "Wait, Mrs. Mar, *dearest* Mrs. Mar!" she seized the book.

"What 's the matter with you?"

"This is *my* part!" said Bella, shutting the volume convulsively. "I know it every bit."

"'Voilà notre nuit de noces commencée!
Je suis bien pâle, dis, pour une fiancée?'"

And on to—

"'Mort! non pas! nous dormons,
Il dort! c'est mon époux, vois-tu, nous nous aimons,
Nous sommes couchés là. C'est notre nuit de noce.
Ne le réveillez pas, seigneur duc de Mendoce,
Il est las. Mon amour, tiens-toi vers moi tourné.
Plus près—plus près encore—'"

Hildegarde, with tears, put out her hand and took

Bella's. No word, just the clasp of hands, till they fell apart to work.

"H'm," said Mrs. Mar dryly. "I suppose you 've seen Sarah Bernhardt go on like that."

"No, oh, no. I don't like Sarah in this. I do it much better."

"A good many people seem to be able to put up with the other lady."

But Bella, smiling, shook her head, as she drew a new strand of silver thread through her needle. "I don't like seeing her make dear Doña Sol so—so snaky, and so wildly unnatural."

"Well, if you think Doña Sol 's *natural*—"

Bella laughed. "You 'd think she was nature itself compared to Sarah."

"People said the same thing about Curly what 's-his-name."

"Curly?"

"Yes, the Englishman who acted with the red-haired woman."

"Oh, you mean Kyrle—"

"Curl! Is that how he calls himself? Well, I 'm sure I 've no objection. I liked him. But people went about saying *he* was n't natural."

Bella looked up. "Did you think he was?"

"Certainly not. But I 'm a person who likes *acting*. I don't want them natural." She wound up in a tone of delicious contempt, "I can see people being natural every day of my life, without paying for it."

Bella laughed. "Oh, I 'm *so* glad I know you, dear Mrs. Mar!" That lady, unmoved by the tribute, began to do her duty by the notes. Bella never listened to

notes, and by and by her little face took on again the tragic look with which she had declaimed, "La fatalité s'accomplit."

Bella was a good deal changed in this last year. Hildegarde, looking at her paling beauty, was sometimes stricken with fear. "What should I do without her!"

The postman's ring. Bella jumped up without ceremony in the middle of Note 2, and ran out to see what had come. Only a paper. It was n't the postman. Merely the little boy outrageously late with "The Evening News."

Bella returned to her dragon—Mrs. Mar read on.

After all, who could be sure but what that paper lying there—how did Bella know but it had a Norwegian telegram in it, saying word had come of the rescue in the arctic of a party of Russians under an American leader? Or no, the leader had done the rescuing—against awful odds. Not Bella alone, but two entire continents were celebrating his name. For this was the intrepid explorer of whom nothing had been heard for nearly four years—who had been given up for dead, by all but Bella Wayne.

And this man—oh, it made the heart beat—this man had discovered the Pole. That was why he 'd been so long away. It took four years to discover the Pole. But it was done. The whole civilized world was ringing with his name. And natural enough. It was the greatest achievement since Columbus' own, and the hero's name was—

No, no, it would n't be like that at all. He would want Bella to be the first to know. The next ring at the door would be a telegram for her. Or no, he would

hardly want to break so long a silence in that brusque way. No, he would write her a beautiful long letter—telling her—explaining— No! Far more like him just to appear. Without writing—without telegraphing. Just take the swiftest steamer across the Atlantic, and the fastest train across the Continent, and some evening like this, she, little thinking it the hour that should bring such grace, she would lift up her eyes and there he would be!—standing before her. Not only without a long explanatory letter, without words, her face would be hidden in his breast.

"There!" Mrs. Mar interrupted an alternative soliloquy of Don Carlos, and Bella started. "They 're early! There are the boys, now!"

"I don't hear them." But as Hildegarde spoke the words she was conscious of steps on the graveled path, that wound its rather foolish way round this side of the house, leading nowhere. No one ever walked there but Hildegarde herself, cutting or tending flowers. She glanced at Bella, and saw in the wide hazel eyes a light she knew.

On the step came crunching gravel. Bella's needle arrested half through a stitch, and all Bella's face saying, "John! John Galbraith!"—and only Hildegarde, through her eyes, hearing. But even Mrs. Mar was under some spell of silence and strained expectation. Now the firm tread paused, and there—there, in front of the low uncurtained window, above the syringas, showed the head and shoulders of a man. Not Trenn, not Harry. Who? Hildegarde held her breath.

CHAPTER XII

"WAS it—*could* it be?" Bella asked mutely, with wildly beating heart.

Hildegarde, too, was wide-eyed and pale, though even in the dusk, plain to see the vigorous upstanding figure was not a bent old man's. Bella felt the happy blood come flooding back about her heart; only to ebb again with a suddenness so mighty, that it seemed to withdraw from her, not gladness only, but volition and all feeling—seemed to want to carry out life itself upon its backward tide.

For the man had trodden down the flowers in the border, and pushed his way through the syringa thicket. He stood at the open window, looking in.

"Well, Mr. Louis Cheviot," said Mrs. Mar, with an affectation of calmness, "where did *you* drop from?" And then Hildegarde's helmeted figure rose up like some spirit of woman out of another time. But she stood quite still, and she looked as if she knew she was dreaming.

Cheviot vaulted over the low sill, and came toward her with eyes of wonder. "What 's all this for? Why are you like that?"—but he had grasped her hand.

"That absurd thing on her head? It was to show the boys," explained Mrs. Mar. "A ball—"

"Are you *sure* you are you?" Hildegarde found her voice at last.

"Much surer than I am that you are you. I saw your light from the street, and I felt I could n't possibly wait to go round and ring the bell. I thought I must come and look in and see what you were like, though I must say I did n't expect—" He was shaking hands with Mrs. Mar now, but he glanced over his shoulder at the tall white figure and past it to Bella. "I believe I 've succeeded in scaring at least one of the party. How do you do, Bella? Feel me. I 'm not a ghost!"

"My dear boy," interrupted Mrs. Mar, speaking in her most matter of fact tone, "sit down and tell us all about it." She at all events was not too agitated to put her marker in the book before she closed it, and she took up her crochet.

Hildegarde was still standing there, but she had taken off the helmet and held it in her hand. "Are you—are you alone?" she asked.

"Yes, alone."

"I suppose you 've heard nothing of Mr. Mar?" said Mrs. Mar, who had never in her life been heard to refer to that gentleman in any more intimate fashion.

"Oh, yes, I have." Cheviot sat down. Hildegarde still stood there. "I was with him between five and six months."

"With father! Has he been to the Klondike, too?"

"No; but I 've been to Golovin."

"Your last letter, nine months ago, said you were coming by the next boat," Mrs. Mar arraigned him.

"Yes, but I had n't heard from Hildegarde when I wrote that."

"What difference did that make?"

"The difference of my following her suggestion to look out for Mr. Mar. I had to go to Golovin to do it."

"Is that where he is now?" demanded his wife. "Why on earth has n't he written?"

Cheviot felt in his inner pocket, as he said, "No, Mr. Mar 's at Nome."

"At Nome!"

"He—he 's not ill?" faltered Hildegarde.

"No, on the contrary, he 's better than he 's been for years."

"Then what on earth 's he doing at Nome?" demanded Mrs. Mar. "Why did n't he go to the place he 's been talking about for all these—"

"He did."

"Well?" and then, with her peculiar incisiveness, "What 's he got to show for it all?"

Cheviot did not wonder that Mar would rather not return to face that particular look in the polished onyx eyes. "I don't know,"—he hesitated—"that there 's very much to show—as yet."

"It ought n't to surprise anybody." The lady turned the highly polished stones in her head with an added glitter.

"When is he coming home?" asked Hildegarde, with a pitiful lip.

"Perhaps next summer."

"Perhaps!" echoed the girl.

Even Mrs. Mar stopped crocheting a moment. "Hush, Hildegarde. Let him tell us." But she must not be supposed to be over-anxious. "Have you just come? Have you had anything to eat?"

"Oh, thank you—in the train. First of all, I must give you the letters he 's sent." He handed one to Mrs. Mar, and one to Hildegarde. Another he laid on the table under the lamp. It was addressed to Messrs. Trennor and Harry Mar. Mother and daughter hurriedly read and exchanged letters.

"Well, Miss Bella, how 's the world treating you?" and Cheviot talked on in his old half-ironic fashion to the pale girl putting away a heap of tangled silver thread in a work-box.

Mrs. Mar's eye, grown even harder and brighter in the last moments, fell upon the envelop under the lamp. She did not scruple to tear it open. But there was little enlightenment even in the epistle to "the boys."

"He says you 'll give us the particulars." Mrs. Mar flung the notice at Cheviot as if plainly to advertise her intention to hold him responsible if those same particulars were not reassuring.

Cheviot told briefly how he had found Mr. Mar at the mission, how an eavesdropper had overheard their private talk, and how Mr. Mar reached his journey's end only to find that the thirty-year-old secret had been filched from him, and other men (who had n't known it but three days), how they had gathered in the harvest."

"Not all—surely father got *something?*"

"By the time he reached Anvil Creek he found it staked from end to end."

Mrs. Mar was plying the crochet-needle with a rapidity superhuman. "Of course he 'd be too late," she said, with a deadly quietness. "Give him thirty years' start, and he 'll be too late."

"It was an outrage that a handful of men should

have been able to gobble the entire creek,'' said Cheviot hurriedly. ''The laws will be changed, beyond a doubt. They 're monstrous. Every miner has been able to take out a power of attorney, and he could locate for his entire family, for all his friends—even for people who don't exist.''

''And those missionaries took it all!''

''Not the missionaries. They were chivvied out of the game by a reindeer herder they 'd let into the secret. It 's too long a story to tell you now, but the herder gave the missionaries the slip, and got word to some friends of his. The rascals formed a district and elected a recorder. By the time we got there, there was n't an inch left for the man who 'd discovered the gold.''

In the pause Hildegarde hunted wildly in her mind for something to say—something that would prevent her mother from speaking—but the girl's tongue could find no word, her mind refused to act.

Fortunately, the story had reduced even Mrs. Mar to silence.

''In the end Christianson and Björk did n't fare much better than Mr. Mar, though I believe they got something. But the herder and his friends are millionaires.''

It was more than one of the company could bear. Mrs. Mar got up and left the room.

Cheviot met Hildegarde's eyes. There was that in his face that gave her the sense of leaning on him in spirit —of being in close alliance with him.

''Poor, poor father!'' she said, in a half whisper. ''Does he take it dreadfully to heart?''

"Well, you can imagine it was n't an easy thing to bear."

"No, but why is n't he here—we 'll all help him to bear it."

Cheviot looked at the door through which Mrs. Mar had disappeared. His eyes said plain as print, "Will she?"

"But father must come home!" Hildegarde broke in on the eloquent silence, as though upon some speech of Cheviot's. "What is he thinking of—he does n't mean—"

Her agitation was so great she hardly noticed that Bella had finished putting the things away in the work-box, and was leaving the room. The moment she had shut the door, "He can't face it," said Cheviot.

"Oh, but that 's madness. He must be told that we—that I—he *must* come home. Why, it 's the most dreadful thing I ever heard of in my life, his bearing it all alone." Her tears were falling. "Tell me—there 's nothing in the letters—Louis,"—she leaned forward—"you and I always tell each other the truth, don't we?"

"I 'm afraid we do," he said, with his old look.

"Then tell me *what 's in father's mind.* What has he said to you?"

"That he will stay up there till—somehow—he has either made his pile, or made his exit."

The girl laid her head down beside the shining helmet on the table, and wept convulsively.

"I had to tell you." Cheviot had come close to her, and his voice was half indignant, half miserable.

Blindly she put out a hand and grasped his arm. "Thank you—you—you have been good. His letter to

me says that you—that you—Louis!" Suddenly she lifted her wet face, "I *am* 'unendingly grateful.'"

"Well, I hope you 'll get over it." He drew his arm out of her grasp, and walked about the room.

Hildegarde followed him with tear-wet eyes that grew more and more bewildered. "I can't understand how you 're here. I thought navigation would n't be open for a month."

"Nearer two."

"Then, how—how—"

"I came out with dogs over the ice."

She stared incredulous. "*How* did you come?"

"Round the coast of Norton Bay, down across the Yukon, and over to the Kuskoquim, and then by the old Russian route to Kadiak Island."

"How in the world did you know the way?"

"Part of the time I had native guides."

"Was n't it a very terrible journey?"

"I don't know that I 'd do it again."

"And when you got down to Kadiak Island?"

"I waited a week for the boat."

"They run in winter!"

"Yes. Kadiak comes in for a swing eastward of the warm Japanese current. The boats ply regularly to Sitka."

"It must have taken you a long time to do all that first part on your own two feet."

He did n't answer.

"When did you see father last?"

"On the morning of the 8th of December, when I cracked my whip over my dog-team and turned my back on Nome."

"Heavens! Why, that 's—"

"Over three months ago." Most men would have paused a moment for contemplation of their prowess or at least of their hardships, but Cheviot was ready to put his achievement at once and for ever behind him—ready, not only to imagine the general interest somewhere else, but to lead the way thither. "To be exact, it was three months and sixteen days ago; but your father was all right when I left him, and he had supplies."

"Has he any friends?"

"He 's got a dog he 's very thick with, and he 's got a comfortable tent."

"A tent, in that climate!"

"It 's all anybody has. No lumber for cabins; little even for sluices, hardly enough for rockers—to rock out the dust, you know. Wood is dearer than gold."

"*A tent!*"

"I assure you there was only one thing he was really in want of."

"What was that?"

"Some way to get word to you. He knew you 'd be anxious. He wants you not to take his failure to heart. He thinks a great deal about that, because he says you helped—"

"Yes, yes."

"He wanted me to make it quite clear to you that in spite of everything he was n't sorry he 'd tried it. And you must n't be sorry either. You must write to him, Hildegarde, and reassure him."

She nodded and turned away her face, but she put up her hand like one who cannot bear much more.

"He was *afraid* you were fretting about him. I never saw him more awfully pleased and glad than when I made up my mind to come out over the ice."

"That appalling journey! You did it for him?"

"No, I did n't."

He waited, as if for a sign, and then, speaking almost surlily, "I did it for myself," he said. "I 'd been away long enough."

"Yes," said Hildegarde, "yes, indeed."

"I could n't bear it any longer, sitting there in the dark and cold, and the"—she raised her eyes—"the—oh, it 's not such a bad place as people make out; if you are n't eating your heart out to know—"

"What 's father doing?" she asked hastily.

"Waiting to hear from you. Waiting, like everybody else, for the ice to go out."

"What will he do when the ice goes out?"

"He 's got some claims," Cheviot lowered his voice to say. "He does n't want anybody but you to know, for fear there 's nothing in them. But as soon as the frost is enough out of the ground to yield to pick and shovel, he means to rock out a few tons of gravel and *see*."

"Do it himself!"—then, as Cheviot did not answer at once, "It 's simply dreadful! It 's— I can't bear it." She hid her face.

"Don't, Hildegarde. I wish you would n't cry."

"Are you going back there?"

"No, oh, no; I 'm not even going back to the Klondike."

Mrs. Mar opened the door behind them. "It must be hours since you made that miserable meal in the train," she said. "Come in here and have some supper."

Cheviot would have declined but that he knew he must some time submit to a tête-à-tête. Best get it over.

After the dining-room door shut behind her mother and Cheviot, Hildegarde still sat there. The only movement about the white figure under the lamp was the salt water that welled up constantly and constantly overflowed the wide, sad eyes. The handle of the other door turned softly—a girl's face looked in.

"Bella"—the motionless figure rose out of the chair and the one at the threshold came swiftly in. "Bella" —the voice was muffled—"my father—my father does n't mean ever to come home."

The incoming figure stopped. "Do the letters say that?" Bella asked, awestruck.

"No, Louis says so."

"Well, I think it was very heartless of him."

"No, it was n't. I made him. It would have been infinitely worse to be always waiting."

"To be always waiting *is* perhaps the worst," said Bella, with lowered eyes.

"Yes, worst of all."

Bella roused herself and came nearer to her friend. "But for Mr. Mar—why, it 's impossible—don't you believe it, dear. It 's absurd to think—"

"He 'll never come back. You 'll see he 'll never come back, unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless"—Hildegarde cleared her tear-veiled voice— "unless some one goes and brings him home."

"Louis Cheviot?"

"Don't you see, he 's failed. He 's been enormously

kind;—he 's been wonderful, but he could n't get my father to come home."

"Are you thinking one of the boys might?"

Hildegarde shook her head. "They could n't make him."

"Who could?"

She looked round the room with eyes that again were filling. But they came back to Bella's face. "Father would do it for *me,*" she said; "don't you know he would?"

"Well," said the other, staring, "if not for you, for no one."

"Yes, yes, he 'd do it for me!" Hildegarde moved about the room with a restlessness unusual in her. She went to each window in turn, pulled down the blinds and drew the curtains; and still she moved about the room. Excitement had drunk her tears. Her face was full of light.

Bella did not stir, but no look or move of Hildegarde's escaped her. She fixed her eyes on the gleaming dragons that crawled at the hem of Hildegarde's skirt. The voices in the next room were audible, but not the words.

Across the street the tireless female had again struck up her favorite march.

"You 'd have to go alone," Bella said presently.

"Yes, I 'd have to go alone."

"It 's an awful journey."

"I suppose so."

"Yes, and the people—the roughest sort of people."

"I would n't be afraid—at least, not much."

"*I* should n't dare to."

"No, no, you 're younger. And besides, even if I were the younger, I 'm the one who could do it." Not often that Hildegarde laid herself open to a charge of arrogance. "Yes," she said, with rising excitement, "*I* could do it, only"—and the high look fell—"it costs a great deal." She stood quite still looking down upon Brunhild's shield, that showed on the dark carpet like a tiny circular pool of gleaming water. Still that maddening piano over the way! "The boys would n't help me," Hildegarde thought out loud, "they 've already—they 'll be disgusted enough as it is." She sat down, still with her eyes on the shield, as if she did n't dare lose sight of it a moment. "Of course mother would n't dream—" After a little pause, "And Louis would say I was mad. But I must think—I must think!" She leaned her tilted chin on her hand, and still like one hypnotized she stared at the metal disk shining there in the shadow. "I must find a way. Father shall not be left up there another winter."

Nothing more, till Bella brought out quite low the words, "I could get you the money."

"*Bella!*" Hildegarde dropped her hand and sat back. "Would you?"

Instead of answering, "I would n't dare to go myself," Bella said.

"Oh, *you* could n't possibly." (Had Bella really meant that she might lend—) "Even if there were any need of it, *you* could n't go." Hildegarde's lips only were saying words, her mind was already faring away on an immense and wonderful journey, that she—*she* was competent to undertake. "You are n't the kind, anyway," she wound up bluntly, coming back.

"Nobody would think you were the kind either—nobody but me."

"Yes, yes. You 've always understood that I was n't a bit like what people thought," and, indeed, few who supposed they knew Hildegarde Mar but would have been surprised at the look in her face to-night, for once betraying not alone a passionate partizanship with her father's stranded and embittered existence, but the glow that even the thought of "going to the rescue" may light in a generous heart, and reflect in the quietest face.

"You could do anything you meant to," said Bella, marveling a little at the new beauty in her friend, "anything. But this—you 'd have to be very brave to go on such a—"

"No, I would n't. I *long* to go."

No great surprise to Bella after all, this admission that Hildegarde, the reticent, the cold, was really burning with all sorts of eagerness that had never been suffered expression.

But there was something more here to-night. Like many another, Hildegarde could have gone through hardship and suffering for the sake of any one she loved, but the look on her face as she sat there under the light, revealed the fact that this journey Bella shrank from even thinking of, that Hildegarde herself had called "appalling," made yet its own strange appeal to the girl, apart from love of her father, independent of the joy of service.

"You think if I did it, it would be because I 'm brave and a good daughter, and things like that. No, it 's none of those things. It 's because, while other people have been going to New York and to Mexico, to London

and to Paris, and—and—the farthest places, while they traveled north, south, east, west, I 've sat here in this little house in Valdivia, and sewed and planted a garden and heard everybody else saying good-by, and listened to that woman over the way playing 'Partant pour la Syrie,' and have still stayed here, and sewed, and gardened, and only *heard* about the world. I 've done it long enough! I 'm going to the North, too!" Hildegarde stood up with eyes that looked straight forward into space. A movement from the other seemed to bring the would-be traveler back. "If anybody will help me," she said, turning her eyes on Bella's face.

The younger girl was on her feet. In the silence the two moved toward each other. Bella lifted her arms and threw them about Hildegarde's neck. "I 've told you I 'll help you."

"I love you very much already, but if you 'd do that for me—" The shining eyes pieced out the broken phrase.

Bella turned her graceful little head toward the dining-room door. Cheviot had raised his voice. But they could n't hear the words.

"There 's only one thing"—Bella spoke in a whisper —"just think a moment; all those hundreds of miles with a dog team over the ice, in an arctic winter. If anybody else had done such a thing we should never have heard the last of it. The world would n't be long in having another book on heroism in high latitudes. But we all know *that* man"—she moved her head in the direction of the voice—"we 'll never hear of it again. He 's done that gigantic journey just for you,"—Hildegarde disengaged herself—"and to be with you again.

And here you are planning to go away. It is n't my business, but I think you 'll be making a terrible mistake, Hildegarde, if you—''

Her friend turned from her with unusual abruptness.

''He 's nicer than ever,'' Bella persisted. ''He 's charming. I always said so.''

''And I always said''—Hildegarde stopped and looked at Bella with an odd intentness. ''You 're a nicer girl than you used to be.''

''Thank you,'' said the other, smiling faintly, but she saw that she had failed.

''And I don't mean because you 're willing to help me in this.''

''What do you mean?''

''There 'd be only one thing that could prevent my letting you lend me the money.''

''Well, you certainly need n't worry about paying it back.''

''It would take two or three years, but that could be managed now that Trenn and Harry want to give me an allowance. It is n't that.''

Bella waited wondering.

''It is that I could n't take a great, great help from you, and go so far away, carrying anything in my heart that—that I 'd kept hid—anything that concerned you.''

A quick fear leapt into Bella's face.

''For one might n't come back, you know,'' the other added.

''There 's only one thing we 've never straightened out,'' said Bella, ''and that 's *my* tangle.''

''I have my share in the thing, I mean. But as I said,

you could n't do now—what you did—when you were little."

"Oh!" Bella drew a sharp breath of relief. "When I was little I know I was a beast."

"You told Louis Cheviot about the altar, and the patron saint; about—"

"Yes," said Bella hastily. "It was pretty mean of me, but I was only twelve."

"It was n't only when you were twelve." Gratitude, common prudence, should have bridled Hildegarde's tongue, but there was something of the judgment day about this hour. Hearts must needs be opened and secrets known. "It was after," she went on, driven by this new necessity to leave nothing hidden if she was to take Bella's help, "it was six years after—when you were eighteen. You had gone away knowing quite well how—how I was feeling about— You knew how I was feeling. Yet you could write pretty heartlessly, considering all things. That gay letter about your engagement. You could write with that insincere air of expecting me to be as happy as you were."

"You surely see it would have been unpardonable of me to have sympathized with you. I *had* to assume you did n't care. You would have done the same."

"No, I would n't."

Bella looked at her. "That 's true," she said, quite low. "You would have shown that you were sorry for me, even in the middle of being happy yourself. You could have done it and not hurt. But I could n't. I did n't know how. The nearest I could come to it was just to pretend I thought you 'd got over it—that you did n't care any longer."

They looked at each other a moment without speaking. Bella with quivering face glided forward.

"Dearest, dearest"—she took Hildegarde's hand, she caught it to her breast. "You are n't going to let him —the Other—spoil *two* lives!"

"At least I 'm ready to risk what 's sure to happen."

"What 's sure to happen?"

"His coming while I 'm away." Hildegarde flung out the words with a passion Bella had never seen in her before. "Yes, that 's what will happen. I shall have waited for him at home here all my life *till* this summer. And this summer, while I 'm gone, he 'll come to Valdivia. You 'll see! He 'll come."

CHAPTER XIII

NO prevision of Hildegarde's as to Cheviot's disapproval of her plan approached the degree to which he fought against her going to the North.

Mrs. Mar, secretly dismayed at her husband's willingness to stay away indefinitely, was not ill-content for once to see the "stolid Hildegarde" stirred to action. It satisfied a need in the mother, that the daughter had never ministered to before. Hildegarde was the sort of girl who could take excellent care of herself, and her health was superb. She had no important concerns such as the boys had to chain them at home. She was not the mother of a family, nor even president of the Shakspere Society. The welfare of the Hindus would be wholly unaffected by her departure. The journey was quite unlike that terrible one involved in going to the Klondike. It could be made in a comfortable ship; the whole of it by sea. Her mother would go with her to the steamer, and Hildegarde would stay on board till her father met her at the Alaskan port.

But they had all reckoned without Cheviot.

He refused to take the idea seriously at first, and when he did—oh, he was serious enough then!

"The maddest scheme that ever entered a sane head!" Hildegarde had no conception of what such a journey

was like. The ships were the most uncomfortable in the world. Freight boats, with no accommodation for women. The food appalling. The company—oh, it did n't even bear talking about!

But Cheviot did talk of it, to Bella, when he discovered her complicity, and so effectually he talked that she withdrew her support.

Hildegarde was speechless with indignation. What spell had he cast that Bella could "go back" on her word. Truly a thing to depend upon—Bella's friendship.

"Oh, please try to understand. I was always frightened at the idea, even before Louis told me—"

"Why should you be frightened," said Hildegarde sternly. "It is n't as if I were a rescue party and my little journey were to the other side of the world. I should n't sail from Norway, and I should n't catch up with anybody in Franz Josef Land."

"Hildegarde! You 've never spoken to me like that before in your life."

"No, I 've never admitted before that you 'd failed me."

Bella, with flushed face, got up to leave the room. "You think I 'm backing out only because of what Louis says. But I meant to tell you it would have been terrible to me to be responsible for your going, after what you said that night Louis came home."

"What did I say?"

"That this summer, while you 're gone—"

"Well?"

"There will be news."

"You mean from—"

"Yes," Bella steeled herself. "As soon as I 'd got you out of the way—"

Hildegarde winced; rather dreadful that she should have said that to Bella—too like what the average male critic would expect. "Did I say *you*, Bella? I only meant fate."

"You were sure he would come this summer. Stay and see."

"It 's only if I 'm not here that John Galbraith will come."

Hildegarde had a final interview with the arch culprit, Cheviot.

"I had no idea you could be like this," she said, toward the close.

"Then it 's as well you should know."

It ended in a breach. He came no more to the house. Hildegarde passed him in the street with lowered eyes.

And Bella had gone home.

The spring went creeping by.

Now June was gone. Even July. Still no news.

"You see," said Hildegarde dully, "father is n't coming back."

August was waning—not even a letter. And from that other more terrible North, no syllable of the tidings, that to reach those two waiting in California, must come round by the old world, and all across the new.

"He is dead," Hildegarde said to herself, and it was not of Nathaniel Mar that she was thinking.

The boys had generously sent their father both money and advice. He was recommended to use the sight draft

on the Alaska Commercial Company, for the purpose of buying his home passage by the very next ship.

At last, when the season was drawing to a close—news!

Not that expected—but something no man had looked for.

Gold had been discovered in the sands of the Nome beach.

Men who had been stranded there—arriving too late for a claim on the creeks—a broken and ragged horde, were now persons of substance and of cheerful occupation, that of "rocking out" fifty to a hundred dollars a day upon the beach at Nome. The gold was not here alone, but under the moss and the coarse grass of the tundra. It clung to the roots when you pulled up the sedgy growths. It was everywhere. What was the contracted little valley of the Klondike compared to this!

"The greatest of all the new world gold-fields has been found. A region, vaster than half a dozen Eastern States, sown broadcast with gold-dust and nuggets. Easy to reach and easy to work."

Here was the poor man's country. If you did n't want to rock out a fortune for yourself, you could earn fifteen dollars a day working for others.

"The beach for miles is lined with miners' tents. Anvil City (hereafter to be called Nome) is booming.

"Building lots that six months ago were worth nothing, to-day bring thousands of dollars.

"Where a year ago was only a bare, wind-swept beach on Bering Sea—one of the most desolate places to be found on earth and beside which the Yukon country has

a fine climate—there is to-day a city of several thousand people, surrounded by the richest placer-diggings the world has seen."

The gold-laden miners returning to Seattle by the last boats of the autumn, told the reporters with a single voice, "The world has known nothing like Cape Nome."

Tongues went trumpeting the mighty news, pens flew to set it down, and telegraph operators flicked the tidings from one end of the earth to the other.

The word "Nome," that had meant nothing for so long to any man but Mar—it became a syllable of strangest portent; stirring imaginations that had slept before, heralding hope to despairing thousands, setting in motion a vast machinery of ships and of strange devices, and of complicated human lives.

New lines of steamships bought up every craft that could keep afloat; companies were formed to exploit the last new gold-saving device; men who had fallen out of the ranks, returned to the struggle saying, "After all, there 's Nome!"

"And this is the moment Mr. Mar will naturally choose for turning his back on the North." It was so that his wife successfully masked her secret anxiety for his return. It was as if she resented so sorely her growing uneasiness about him—fought so valiantly against the slow-dawning consciousness of the share she had in his exile, that she must more than ever veil secret self-criticism by openly berating him. Above all she must disguise the impatience with which she awaited his return "this autumn, at the latest." "Now," she would say, "now that even he could n't fail to make a good

thing by staying, he—oh, yes, to be sure, *he 'll* come hustling home!'' If only she had been the man!

One of the last boats brought a letter. There *was* gold in the beach sand, Mar wrote, but every inch was being worked over and over, and its richness had been exaggerated. The place was overrun with the penniless and the desperate. The United States military post established there was powerless to maintain law and order. Drunkenness, violence, crime, were the order of the day. The beach was a strange and moving spectacle.

''Spectacle! He goes and looks on!'' was Mrs. Mar's way of disguising her dismay. He returned the boys' money, ''since it was sent for a purpose so explicit.'' He was ''staying in.''

Other letters, brought by the same steamer, told what Mr. Mar had omitted to mention: that typhoid fever was at work as well as those gold-diggers on the famous beach.

Men were dying like flies.

The third winter came down, and the impregnable ice walls closed round ''the greatest gold-camp on the globe.''

''Typhoid! Even if he escapes the fever, he will stay up there till he dies, unless—'' Hildegarde was glad she had not yet bought anything for the coming season. In spite of her brothers' allowance she would become a miser—hoarding every coin that came her way. She would make her old gowns do, even without Bella's transforming fingers. She thought twice even about spending car fare. To eke out her resources she would sell Bella's beautiful presents, and the first boat that

went north in the spring should carry Hildegarde to her father—or to his grave.

It was gray business waiting for this first summer of the century. What news might one expect from a man lost four years ago between Norway and Franz Josef Land? What from that other in the nearer-by North, where men dug gold and fought typhoid? What fatality was it that made of all hope and all desire a magnetic needle? Hildegarde remembered how Bella, to the question, "Why do you suppose there 's this mania among us for the North?" had answered, "I don't know, unless it is that we have the South at home. Perhaps Hudson Bay people and Finlanders dream of the tropics. I don't know. But I 've heard nothing so afflicts a Canadian as hearing his country called 'Our Lady of the Snows.' I think there never was such a beautiful name. But it may be because I live with orange blossoms all about me."

Certainly it was harder waiting without Bella. Together each year they had hoped for news. Now apart, they feared it.

Oddly enough, what helped Hildegarde through the heavy time was the establishment of an understanding, half incredulous, wholly unavowed, between her and her mother. It appeared she had Mrs. Mar on her side—else why did that lady save up every newspaper reference to the new gold-camp to read aloud as Hildegarde sat at her sewing. The most transcendent classic ever penned would be put aside for—

" 'Extracts from the note-book of Mr. McPherson, the third man to strike pay on the beach.

'(They are absolutely correct, as I saw his diary and the mint returns for the gold, which were at the rate $19 an ounce, yielding him nearly $10,000.)

'Aug. 11th.—Macomber and Levy: about a mile and a half from Anvil City. Here I got a nugget weighing $4. The nugget was found in the sand, about 250 feet from low tide. Jim Dunsmuir and William Bates told me that they had averaged $40 per day rocking. They were about eleven miles south of Anvil. Price, on No. 8 Anvil, Sunday, 20th of August, sluiced out $6,400 in seven hours, with six men. Lindblom took out $18,000 in eighteen hours, with six men, August 14th.

'Aug. 29th.—Leidley made a wooden caisson and sunk it about 250 ft. beyond low tide, and got from fifteen to fifty cents per shovel. I did not see this experiment, but I believe firmly that the richest part of the beach is beyond low tide.

'There will be more money come out from Nome than came from the Klondike.' ''

"Here 's a column headed—

" 'A REGION RICHER THAN PIPE-DREAMS

" 'Nome defies all theories and every precedent. Its greatest mines have been found, and its greatest fortunes have been made by men who knew nothing of mining. Gold has been discovered by lawyers and doctors, dry-goods' clerks, plow-boys, barbers, fiddlers and politicians, in a thousand places where old miners would have sworn, and did swear, it was impossible. Millions of dollars in glittering dust and nuggets have been thawed out of frozen rubble and moss, and washed from

ocean beaches and other unheard-of depositories by young divinity students, country printers, piano professors and didapper dandies, whom nobody ever suspected of knowing grindstones from thousand-dollar quartz, or iron pyrites from free gold.' ''

Mrs. Mar read on, intoxicating herself. ''Here 's a woman who was up there in the summer when the beach gold was found. She 's brought home $15,000, and a claim she refused to take $38,000 for.''

But if there was anything about typhoid in the paper Hildegarde had to find it out for herself. Little by little she knew that however deterred her mother had been by Cheviot's onslaught the spring before, she was either consciously or unconsciously coming to look favorably on Hildegarde's old plan.

What the inexperience of the girl could not guess was that Mr. Mar's absence had taught his wife several things. And that lady had no inclination to gather another year's harvest of the bitter fruit. If Hildegarde could get him to come home, Hildegarde ought to be supported in spite of Cheviot and the boys. But real confidence between them was so little easy, that the girl said nothing to her mother of her plan to raise money by selling the beautiful necklace and the other things that Bella had from time to time brought home to her from abroad. Hildegarde would go to a man she could trust—''the family jeweler,'' as they called the individual whose high office had been to restore the pins to brooches that Mrs. Mar's energetic fingers had wrenched off, and to mend Mr. Mar's grandfather's watch-chain when it broke, as it used, two or three times every year.

To the family jeweler, then, Hildegarde took her box of treasures. "What are they worth?"

The little man screwed a glass in his eye, and examined rare stones and renaissance enamel with an omniscient air.

"I know you 'll do your best for me," Hildegarde said anxiously.

"Of course—certainly, Miss Mar. Not very new, are they?"

"New! Oh, no—they 're so old they 're very valuable."

"Yes. H'm. Yes."

"I need all you can possibly get me for them, Mr. Simonson."

"I 'll examine them thoroughly, Miss Mar, and let you know."

As she went out, there was Bella coming down the street. Acting on an impulse, Hildegarde turned off the main thoroughfare, pretending not to see. But it made her heart sore to think, "Bella in Valdivia, and not with us! I not even to know!"

Miss Wayne went into the familiar Simonson's. "Was that Miss Mar who was here a moment ago?"

"Yes."

"Oh, is it broken? That 's the necklace I got for her in Rome."

"No, not broken. I suppose you don't remember what you gave for it?"

Miss Bella put on her most beguiling air, and took the old man into her confidence. She would buy the things herself and pay him a commission, and he was not to say but what a San Francisco dealer had made the two-hundred-dollar offer.

"'I know you 'll do your best for me,' Hildegarde said, anxiously"

When she got back to her hotel she telephoned to Cheviot.

The next day that young gentleman had an interview with Hildegarde's brothers down at the ranch. They were even boisterously of Cheviot's opinion. They would simply refuse their consent to their sister's undertaking such a journey. But to Cheviot's anxious sense they spoke too airily. Too certain they could prevent the abomination.

"Don't antagonize her, you know," warned Cheviot. "Make her see the reasonableness of our—of your objection." And the boys agreed.

Even before Cheviot had made money in the Klondike, and come home to be made a partner in the bank; the Mar boys had looked upon him, not only as a probable, but as a highly desirable brother-in-law.

They soothed his natural indignation at Hildegarde's foolishness, and they told him they 'd meet him at the bank after giving her a talking to.

They were late for the appointment, and the moment they appeared in the room behind the public offices, Cheviot saw they had not prospered.

"Hildegarde 's the most pig-headed creature in the universe!"—and a few more illuminating details.

"But why did n't you tell her—"

"Told her everything. Water on a duck's back."

"But what did she say?"

" 'Women have done it before.' "

"It 's not true!" cried Cheviot, jumping up. "The world has never seen anything comparable to what this year's rush to Nome will be. The mob that will be going—"

"She quotes the Klondike, 'That was worse,' she says, 'yet there were women among the men who got there, lived there, and came home.' Damn it! it 's true, you know!"

"It is n't true. The Klondike was a totally different proposition. The people who got to the Klondike the year of the rush were all picked men—a few women, yes, I admit, a few women—God help them. But the mob—a rascally crew enough, lots of them—but they were men of some means, men of brawn and muscle and mighty purpose or, simply, they did n't survive. If they were n't like that, they turned back as thousands did, from Juneau, from Skagway, from Dyea—or they fell out a little further on. Did n't I see them on the Dalton trail and the Chilcoot Pass, glad to lie down and die? I tell you, only the hardiest attempted it, and only the toughest survived. *That 's* the sort of pioneer that peopled the Klondike. Nome 's another story. Nome 's accessible by sea. Any wastrel who can raise the paltry price of his passage can reach the American gold-fields. Any family disgrace can be got rid of cheap by shipping him to Nome. Any creature who 's failed at everything else under the sun has this last chance left. Be sure he 'll go to Nome—*with Hildegarde!* Good God! Drunkards, sharpers, men—and women, too (oh, yes, that sort!), and people hovering on the border line of crime or well beyond it—*they 'll* fill the north-bound ships. Hildegarde alone with such a crew!" Cheviot jumped to his feet. "I 'd infinitely rather a sister of mine were struggling with a pack on her back over the Chilcoot Pass along with the Klondike men of '97, than see her shut up on board a ship with the horde that will go to Nome."

He walked up and down the little inner office, his eyes bright with anger and with fear. And he added terrors not to be put before the girl herself, but for the mother, if Hildegarde should be obdurate. "Make her understand that Nome this summer will be the dump-heap of the world."

"I did," said Trenn, distractedly. "I gave her my opinion of what they were like—those other women she quoted who had gone. It was n't even news to her!"

"What! She accepted that?"

Trenn looked profoundly humiliated. Any nice girl would have pretended she could n't credit such a state of things, even if she 'd heard them hinted. But Hildegarde had said gravely, "Yes, I know what you mean, miserable women have done it for horrible ends. It 's that that makes me ashamed to hesitate. Can't a girl venture as much for a good end as those others for—"

"Oh, Hildegarde 's mad!" said Trenn, with a flush on his handsome face.

"Nevertheless, she 'll go," said Harry.

"But Mrs. Mar! What 's she about?"

Cheviot went to see.

"You surely don't mean to let her go?"

"My good man, I 'd like nothing better than to go myself."

"Then why don't you?" demanded Cheviot rudely.

Another woman might have pointed out that she was in her sixty-second year. No one would have expected such an excuse from Mrs. Mar. There was something in her face Cheviot had never seen there before, as with obvious unwillingness she brought out the answer, "Hil-

degarde can do this errand best. At least, as far as concerns her father. Of course''—she recovered some of her native elasticity—''if *I* went I 'd get a claim, too. You 'd see! I 'd come home with a fortune. I doubt if Hildegarde does, though she has more in her than I 've sometimes thought. Hildegarde won't come to any harm.''

Cheviot, too outraged for the moment to speak, got up and looked blindly for his hat. When he found that, he had also found his tongue. ''The only comfort I can see in the miserable affair is that she 'll find two hundred dollars is n't nearly enough. There is n't a place on the globe where living costs as much as it does at Nome.''

''She 's been saving up her allowance for a year.''

Cheviot threw down his hat. ''I tell you it would be mad for an able-bodied man to go with less than a thousand dollars margin.''

''Hildegarde can't raise anything like that. But she 'll have enough to get her there, and something over.''

Cheviot looked at her. ''You mean she 's ready to go without even enough for her return expenses?''

''She says she can leave the question of returning.''

''She knows we—her brothers will send out funds to get her back!'' groaned Cheviot, beginning to walk up and down. ''And she, *Hildegarde,* is willing to embarrass her father by being a charge on him?''

''She won't stay long. And Nome lots are selling for thousands. Her father has at least the land his tent stands on.''

Cheviot struck his hands together in that startling if

infrequent way of his. It made even Mrs. Mar rather nervous. "Go and argue with her yourself," said the lady, with raised voice and a red spot glowing on either cheek. "I should n't be able to move her. I never have been able to move Hildegarde. That 's the worst of these quiet people."

"You say that, and yet you are n't really opposing her."

"Me? No," said Mrs. Mar, fixing him with unflinching eyes. "I 'm making up the deficit."

Cheviot had never before longed to murder a fellow creature. "You realize, of course," he said quietly, "she is n't even sure of finding her father alive." Angry as he was, when he saw the look that thrust brought to Mrs. Mar's face, he was sorry he had presented it so mercilessly. "What she 'll probably find," he hurried on to say, "is that Mr. Mar has gone to the Casa da Paga. That was his plan. Or the Fox River—or God knows where."

"If she goes as far as Nome, she 'll be able to go still further," said Hildegarde's mother, though her voice was n't as steady as her words implied.

"I understand you, then, at last!" Cheviot stopped before her with anger-lit eyes. "You are ready to see a young girl—"

"Not every girl."

"A girl like Hildegarde."

"Precisely, one like Hildegarde. She can do it."

"Poor Hildegarde!" burst from his lips, and the implication, "to have a mother like you," would have pierced many a maternal breast. But it glanced off Mrs. Mar's armor and fell pointless.

"Hildegarde Mar"—with an air of defending her daughter from Cheviot's low opinion of her—"is a person of considerable dignity of character."

"Do you think it necessary to tell me that?"

"Singularly enough, yes. And to add that I who know her best, have never yet seen her show any sign of not being able to take proper care of herself."

"Under ordinary conditions. But, as I told the boys—"

"A woman who can't take care of herself under conditions out of the ordinary, can't take care of herself at all."

Again Cheviot opened his lips, but Mrs. Mar, grasping the arms of her rocking-chair, indoctrinated the purblind man. "The truth is, that a girl in good health, who has n't been kept in cotton, and who has n't been scared by men's going on as you 're doing, is far abler to cope with life than—than—" She pulled herself up an instant, seeming to feel that after all man is hardly worthy to know the whole truth upon these high themes. But she thought extremely well of Cheviot, or she would never have permitted him to speak to her as he had done. And he loved Hildegarde. "The truth is," she went on, "Hildegarde is quite right about this. There 's no reason why she *should n't* go half as strong as the reason why she should."

"The reason! You think it 's on account of Mr. Mar. It is n't. Bella will tell you Hildegarde *wants* to go on this degrading journey. She said everybody had traveled about and seen the world but her. She had never been farther than Seattle to see Madeleine Somebody."

"That 's true."

"You see! Hildegarde is full of curiosity about—things."

"Why not?"

"Oh, why indeed! But the fact opened my eyes to how much—how little Mr. Mar's welfare has to do with her crazy scheme."

"It has n't opened your eyes very wide, Louis." Mrs. Mar shook her head with the air of one looking back over a long road painfully traversed. "Nobody shrinks more from a fuss and a falling-out than Hildegarde. This winter, without Bella, and without you, and without—It has n't been easy for Hildegarde. She would have given in about Nome long ago, but for—" Mrs. Mar suddenly leaned forward again, and speaking hurriedly, "Somehow or other Hildegarde *knows*. I believe she 's known all along."

"Knows what?"

"What her father meant to do."

"About not coming home?"

"Yes."

"She knows that because I told her."

"You knew it!"

"Yes."

"And yet"—she gripped the arms of the rocking-chair, and her eyes shone—"you come here to get me to prevent the only step being taken—"

"No! Only to protest against Hildegarde's taking it. Good heavens!"—he was losing his self-control—"Hildegarde is—"

"Well and strong, and no such fool as you seem to think."

He set his square jaw. "A little young for such a—"

"Twenty-six."

"You forget or don't know she 's also—attractive."

"Attractive!" Mrs. Mar repeated with a weight of contemptuous meaning. "Since what you imply is so little a credit to your sex, I may be allowed to say she has shot at a mark with her brothers, and if it 's necessary, she can carry a revolver."

"Good God! And you 're her mother!"

Mrs. Mar sprang to her feet. "Yes, I 'm her mother, and that I did n't myself suggest her going to get her father to come home, is only that I 'm under the spell of the old foolishness about women. The fact is, that we 're much better able to look out for ourselves than men are—yes, stare as much as you like! It 's so. You 're all *babies,* I tell you, and if the women did n't look after you, you 'd be *dead* babies!"

Cheviot snatched up his hat a second time and walked to the door. Mrs. Mar, seeing him going off like that with never another word, and with that fixed wretchedness on his face, quickly crossed the room and took hold of his arm, as his hand was on the door knob. "Hildegarde is only going to do in a more open way what women are always doing," she said.

Cheviot turned angrily, but so astonished was he to see tears on her face that he stood speechless.

"Some woman said it in a magazine the other day," she went on, "but every woman who 's good for anything is doing it."

"Going to Nome!"

"Going out to the battlefield in the evening to look after the wounded."

CHAPTER XIV

HILDEGARDE wrote to Madeleine Smulsky, now Mrs. Jacob L. Dorn. Madeleine's husband, being a Pacific Coast importer in a large way, might be able to advise in which of the fleet of steamers advertised to sail from San Francisco, and certain to be the first boat of the year to reach Nome—in which should a traveler put trust.

The answer brought Mr. Dorn's somewhat scornful profession that he knew nothing whatever about the hastily formed San Francisco lines, and little good about the mushroom companies of his own city, but if Hildegarde thought of sailing from Seattle he would look into the matter for her. Seattle was the better port, being the natural gateway to the North (Hildegarde could hear Mr. Dorn saying that), in witness whereof the bustling, booming city swarmed already with more prospective passengers than there were ships to float them—all wisely laying in their provisions, buying machinery and outfit in that best of all places—San Francisco? oh, dear, no! in Seattle, the City of the Future! Hildegarde must at all events come and visit the Dorns. Under the guidance of Madeleine's husband, she would probably find out that, at best, the journey to Nome was impracticable for a lady.

The middle of April found Miss Mar a guest of the Dorns. Jacob L. seemed presently to abandon all idea of dissuading his wife's friend from carrying her wild scheme into execution, but he pointed out the little need there was to rush blindly into avoidable difficulties. Better ships were in process of being chartered for the northern service, in view of the undreamed-of demand. The season, moreover, was late this year. Those earlier, inferior vessels (schooners and what not) that were to get off before the middle of May would only spend the time "knocking about the North Pacific, among the icebergs."

So Hildegarde waited while Mr. Dorn looked thoroughly into the question. Even looking into it seemed perilous. It told on the gentleman's health, as one might suppose. When Hildegarde had been only a few days under his roof, her host took to his bed with congestion of the lungs.

Madeleine absorbed in nursing the husband had little time for the friend. Hildegarde was suddenly thrown on her own resources. But she felt it would be impolitic to write that fact to Valdivia. From one shipping office to another, from Southwick's Great Outfitting Emporium to the Baumgarten Brothers' Wholesale Provision House, she went in quest of information; threading her way through the bustling streets, where among the featureless thousands, day by day she often saw the figure of the frontiersman in broad-brimmed hat and brown boots, laced to the knee; or the weather-beaten miner, in "waders" and brown duck or mackinaw. "*They 're* coming to Nome!" she would say to herself, looking on them already as fellow-travelers. One feel-

ing much with her is perhaps really rather new in woman's experience, among the many things called "new" that are yet so old. It seems as if never before her generation could it have been a matter of course to a girl like Hildegarde Mar, that she should feel instinctively it would be as absurd to treat these bearded frontiersmen with condescension, as to be terrified of them. Not that she analyzed the situation. It was too simple for that. Her feeling was merely that these uncouth fellow-creatures were possible friends of hers. As she met and passed them, or in imagination "placed" them in her coming experience, her mental attitude was singularly untarnished by the age-old anxiety of the unprotected female casting about for a champion. Something less self-centered than that, something kindlier, less the child of fear. Cheviot might have qualms, but man was not for Hildegarde her natural enemy. A woman alone was not obliged to peep furtively about for shelter, or for some coign of vantage, like one pursued in a hostile land. Not his immemorial prey, she; but like him the possible prey of circumstance, with ignorance for her arch-enemy as well as his. Those booted and sombreroed men—some of them at least—had already met and overcome the common enemy. They would be masters of the situation up there. Herself the mere ignorant human being, eager to learn, innocent of class-illusion, intensely alive to "differences," yet knowing which of them were only skin-deep, or rather education-deep; young, yes; attractive, too; a girl going into a strange new world who yet goes fearlessly, hopefully, carrying faith in human nature along for her shield and her buckler. If this is an apparition new upon the earth, then perhaps

the modern world has something to be proud of beyond the things it has celebrated more.

Not that she encountered no difficult moments. She was stared at, and she could see that she was speculated about. Well, that was no killing matter. Perhaps it was because she was so tall. When in the thronged and noisy offices she was crowded and pushed by an excited horde—though shown no special disrespect as a woman—she was certainly not comfortable, and was even a little forlorn. When a brow-beating passenger-agent vented his ill-temper upon her refusal to buy a ticket forthwith without waiting "to inquire further," she felt the man's rudeness keenly, absurdly. But it was not till some "masher" of a clerk spoke to her with a vulgar familiarity that discomfort went down before humiliation in the thought, "What would Louis say if he knew?" However, the clerk soon saw his error, and the tall, quiet girl was taken at a different valuation. Men, even the most ignorant men, learn these lessons more quickly than is supposed. But, oh, it was n't easy to do the work of preparation alone! comparing, eliminating, deciding all by oneself. For at every step, upon every question, one encountered conflicting testimony. Every store-window that one passed displayed things "Indispensable for Nome." Every ship that sailed was the best, and bound to be first at the goal. Now and then to some one of the besieging hundreds at the offices, Hildegarde would put a question. The women looked askance. The men answered civilly enough. But if they knew little more than Hildegarde, they entertained darker fears. And still, and always, testimony was in conflict. The firm that impressed her most favorably,

whose office she had just left "to think it over"—why they, it seemed, were a set of thieves. Passage on one of their ships meant ten to twenty days' starvation on short rations of sour bread and salt horse. Heavens, what an escape! But that other firm she was on her way to interrogate—they were traffickers in human life! Did n't she know they had been buying disabled craft of every description, even hauling up abandoned wrecks out of the sea, sweeping the entire Pacific for derelict and rotten craft that they might paint and rename, and make a fortune out of crowding such crazy vessels full of ignorant human cattle for Cape Nome?

But these people, proprietors of the New Line, in whose offices they stood—their ships if starting later were at least seaworthy. Seaworthy? 'Sh! Their ships did n't so much as exist. These men only waited, postponing sailing dates on one pretext or another, till they had got your money and filled, and over-filled, the lists of their phantom ships. When they 'd done that, you 'd see! They 'd pocket their thousands and abscond into Canada.

While Hildegarde waited hesitating, even on the smallest and least faith-inspiring boats the passenger lists rapidly filled. And still every train that thundered into the Seattle station disgorged its hundreds clamoring to be taken to Nome. Already, since Hildegarde's arrival, a number of schooners and several steamers, with flags flying and bands playing, had gone forth to meet the early ice floes. Would these daring ones get any further, after all, than the Aleutian Islands before June? "You 'll see they 'll have to put in at Dutch Harbor for a month!" Hildegarde saw men, standing in dense

crowds on the wharves, shake their heads, as they watched each ship go forth on the great adventure.

"All my life," thought the girl, "I shall remember the port of Seattle, when the first boats went to Nome."

There were those who might seem to have more cause than Hildegarde Mar to remember that unprecedented spectacle. For to the wonderful "Water Front" sooner or later every creature in Seattle found his way—commonly to suffer there some strange, malignant change. Even the quiet ones began to emit strange sounds, and to tear about as if afflicted with rabies; the most self-controlled went mad among the rest. They fought their way through the barriers, men and women alike; they screamed about their freight upon the docks; hurrahing and gesticulating, they saw maniac friends off, on ships whose decks were black with people, whose rigging, even, swarmed with clotted humanity, like bees clinging in bunches to the boughs of a tree.

In the "orderly" streets of a great city, a girl like Hildegarde would have been remarked, followed, probably accosted. She had had experience of that even in Valdivia, where nearly every creature knew who she was. In the vast and eager crowd on the Seattle water front she passed with little notice and wholly unmolested. Every one had business of his own. If the man who pushed against you till he nearly knocked you down was not an excited passenger rushing for the next ship, he was a company agent seeing off a hundred thousand dollars' worth of machinery; or he was the gentleman in a smaller way of business, who was beating up trade in the neighborhood of the Last Chance Bazaar. Here and there on a tiny temporary platform, nearly swamped by

the crowd, or standing insecurely on a jostled barrow, merchants whose ages ranged from eight to eighty, offered you something you 'd bless them for every hour of your life at Nome. Here an improved sort of prospecting pan—you had only to carry it up to lat. 62° to fill it full of gold all day long. There was a Nome mosquito-mask, fastened like a gallows'-cap on the face of a stiff, pale figure of wax, lifted high in air, rigid, travestying death—horribly arresting. There was every kind of waterproof—hat, coat and boot; for, that summer at Nome meant nothing but rain, was the one point upon which every one agreed. By way of object lesson, "rockers" for separating Nome gold from Nome sand are being jogged to and fro upon the wharves; vendors of patent medicine are crying one another down; a different concentrated food is proclaimed at every corner, a new gold "process" every ten feet and bedlam all around you. Copper plates; pickaxes; shovels; and—"Here y' are! The last thing out! Compound-corkscrew-screw-driver-monkey-wrench, 'n' can-opener. All y' grub goes to Nome in cans. Y' 'll starve to death right plumb in the middle o' plenty, 'nless y' get this yer noo compound-corkscrew-screw-driver-monkey—" The rest is drowned by the *dernier cri* in "Nome sto-o-o-ves! Burn - oil - burn - wood - burn - coke - burn - anything - in - hell - and - never - burn - the - dinner! Nome sto-o-o-ves!" Other hawkers so hoarse you heard nothing but "Nome! Nome!" as if they had it there—a nostrum you might buy at home.

Hildegarde's mind went back to the old reconnaissance map in the dining-room. She so little she must climb upon a chair to read in her father's fine, clear writing,

the name opposite a tiny projection in the coast line. It had been a place only he seemed to know about. Now on every sign, on every lip, Nome! Nome! Nome!

Overheard fragments among new-comers at the shipping offices, no more "Which boat?" but "Can you, even by paying some feller a bonus, get anything in the shape of a ticket before June?"

The element of chance was not to be eliminated. It must be faced. On her way to the office of the Line she had first affected, she saw swinging on in front of her, hands in overcoat pockets, shouldering his way through the throng, one of those same high-booted, wide-hatted men of whom she had said at first, "He 's going, too!" But this man had been marked out by his air of enjoying the enterprise. Most people, even away from the maddening water front, bore about with them a harassed, or at best, pre-occupied countenance, the majority sallow and seamed and weary. This wide-mouthed young giant with the fresh complexion—he was one of whom you felt not only "he knows," but "he knows it 's all right." Now, if he should be on his way to secure a passage at this same office, Hildegarde would take it as a lucky omen. But he carried his tall figure swinging by. His back seemed to say, "No, thank you. I know too much to be taken in by the *Golden Sands Company.*" Hildegarde went past the Golden Sands Company herself, without quite intending to. The ruddy-complexioned one was stopped by a fussy little, middle-aged man, who said, "Wonder if you can tell me where the Centrifugal Pump Company's offices are?"

"What?" says the red-cheeked giant as Hildegarde went by. "You mean Mitchell, Lewis and Starver?"

"Y-yes," said the fussy man. "Are they all right, do you think?" and the rest was lost. What a pity she could n't go up as simply as that, and ask his Giantship about the boats. But no. He was a rather young giant, and a little too enterprising-looking. No, better not. He stared at people. That was n't the sort of man she 'd ever spoken to.

She had n't analyzed it, but with all her simplicity and all her sense of freedom, she was acutely sensitive about making any avoidable move that might be misconstrued. The unfortunate women of the world had spoiled things. Not only for themselves—for others, too. She crossed the street and went back toward the "Golden Sands." Glancing over her shoulder, she saw the giant part from his interlocutor and disappear in the office of Hankin & Company. So that was the best line! Slowly she retraced her steps, turning over in her mind all she 'd heard about Hankin & Company. Perhaps even without this last indication the evidence did point Hankinward. She went in. Craning over heads, and peering across shoulders she saw the huge young man talking to the agent. She edged her way nearer.

"You 'll have plenty o' time to load your stuff. The *Congress* 'll be at the docks Toosday."

"Sure?"

"Dead certain."

The giant nodded and strode out on seven-league boots. A moment later Hildegarde had laid $125 down before the alcohol-reeking, red-eyed, nervous agent, who seemed to feel called on to explain that he 'd been up all night "on the water front, seeing off the *Huron.*" While he made out the voucher, huskily he congratulated

the young lady that an intending passenger by this best of all ships had had a fit on the water front the night before, and was probably dying now "over at the Rainier Grand." His wife had been in half an hour ago about reselling the ticket. And that was it. Number twenty-one. He handed Hildegarde the slip of gray-blue paper which transferred to her the dying man's right to a first-class berth on Hankin & Company's Steamer *Congress,* sailing from Seattle to Cape Nome on the 19th of May.

Now for a decision amongst the contending outfitters and provision dealers.

She had studied well the prospectuses, the "folders" and the hand-books. She had made notes and lists. She knew she must provide herself with:

"A tent and two pair dark blue Hudson Bay blankets.

"Water boots.

"Several yards stout netting.

"Leather gaiters.

"Cowboy's hat.

"Canvas bag, with shoulder strap.

"Oil stove, and oil."

To this, upon her mother's initiative, she proposed to add a pistol; on her own, four pounds of chocolate and a handsome supply of peppermints.

She had culled from newspapers, books, and advertisements at least six different lists of the kind and quantity of food one would need. Already she had ordered several cases of mineral water, but she was still pondering "evaporated eggs," "desiccated potatoes," "malted milk tablets," and "bouillon capsules," as she stood in one of the great provision houses that very day she had got her ticket.

The place was crowded. Here, as elsewhere, a few women among the many men; both sexes equally bent on business. While she waited in the throng, a clerk who, with difficulty, had been making his way to her, interrupted a query modestly preferred by a little weather-beaten woman in black. As if he had not heard the one who spoke, of the one who had said nothing he asked, "Is anybody looking after you?"

"As soon as the lady has finished—" began Hildegarde. The rusty one glanced at her fellow-woman in some surprise, and said again to the clerk, "I just stepped in to ask you to be sure to have a keg of witch-hazel ready to go out with our stuff. You ran out of it last year."

"Oh, are you Mrs. Blumpitty?"

"Yes."

"Have you given your order?" The clerk's manner had changed, he had plenty of time now.

"Mr. Blumpitty will step in to-morrow about it. He is quite a little rushed to-day, hunting around for a place to sleep in."

"There 's a good many doing that," said the clerk. "There has n't been a room vacant at a hotel for a week."

"I guess that 's right. And we got a party of twenty-eight this time. I only wanted to jog you about that witch-hazel." She was moving off.

Hildegarde stood in the way. "Are you going to Nome?" asked the girl.

"Yes."

"Do you mind telling me what you are going to do with witch-hazel, up there?"

"A person wants witch-hazel everywhere."

"Why do they?"

"Best doctor in the world."

"What 's it good for?" Typhoid was in the ignorant mind.

"Good for anything. Burns, cuts, bruises, anything."

"Oh!" Down at the foot of the list, after peppermints, went witch-hazel. Again the little woman showed signs of moving on. But she looked back at Hildegarde over her shoulder and, as if to imply: this much I leave you, even if you *are* too good-looking to inspire confidence. "Witch-hazel ain't like those noo things they advertise. It 's been tested."

"Oh, has it?"

She did n't know much, this young lady. "Guess it *has*," said the little woman. "In every country store in my part of the world, you 'll find a keg of witch-hazel!" and with that she would have been gone but that the crowd pressed her back.

"What is your part?" asked Hildegarde.

The woman looked round at her suspiciously. "Maine."

"You come all the way from Maine to go to Nome?"

She nodded. "Guess everybody here but you is goin' straight to Nome." Her eye fell on Hildegarde's pencil, suspended above the list held too high for the little woman to know its exact nature. "Noospaper woman?" she said, putting the most charitable construction on the presence here among the hard-featured horde of a person like this.

Hildegarde had been asked that question before. "No," she said, and saw her credit fall in the rusty one's

eyes. "But I 'm going to Nome, too," the girl hastened to add, wishing to recover ground. But it was plain she had only further damaged herself.

"Oh," said the witch-hazel advocate, moving off with some precipitation through a momentary opening.

Hildegarde found the clerk who had seemed to know Mrs. Blumpitty. "Have you heard what boat she 's going by?"

"No," said the clerk, "but she 'll go by the best, I bet."

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, she 's one o' the few that knows the ropes. She was there last year." And he was called away.

She might know Hildegarde's father!

Early the next day the girl reappeared at Baumgarten's. No, she was n't going to give her order just yet. She was waiting to see Mrs. Blumpitty. So the Baumgarten Brother turned from her to advise a customer against taking saccharine instead of sugar. "You 'll come to hate the taste even in tea and coffee, and, as for eating it sprinkled on anything, you 'll find you simply can't." A group of people were hotly discussing vegetables, and whether to take them desiccated or "jest as they are." The new ones "not in yet," the Baumgarten Brother admitted; "and the old ones sure to sprout," said some one else. A Klondiker gave his views: "Take 'em dried. Lot less freight on the boat. Lot easier packed about afterwards." A babel of voices rose: "Tasteless," "No good left in 'em," "No feeding power." Another voice: "Who cares about how easy it is to take somethin' that 's no good?" "People go on about evaporated food jest as if it was the Klondike and the Chilcoot Pass all over ag'in. 'T ain't. Nome 's a

different proposition.'' The Baumgarten Brother was instructed to put down half the order in dried and half in fresh. Then a detachment went away to see opened and to taste a new brand of canned cooked sausages. People stood about with pickles and shavings of ''chipped beef'' and cheese samples in their hands, nibbling and looking thoughtful. Others ate butter off the end of a penknife, and said, ''It ain't no better 'n margarine, an' costs more.'' When for two hours and ten minutes Hildegarde had stood there against the low columnar wall of piled tomato cans (a kind of basaltic formation, showing singularly regular ''fracture'' and wide range of color-stain), the clerk of yesterday gave her a stool to perch on in the corner. Many of the crowding faces were grown already familiar. There was the fresh-complexioned giant. He came in with a pleasant towering briskness, and stood talking to one of the Baumgartens. As Hildegarde watched him, she told herself she was glad that man was going on ''her'' ship. Then reflecting, ''Why, I 'm staring at *him* now!'' she turned away her eyes, and there suddenly was Mrs. Blumpitty, with a thick-set, dun-colored husband—his face a grayish-yellow, his hair a yellow-gray, his eyes yellow, with pale gray irises.

Hildegarde descended from the high stool and made her way to the couple. ''Is it true you were at Nome last summer?''

''Yes.'' Mrs. Blumpitty drew closer to the dun-colored husband, as if more than ever mistrustful of the tall young lady.

But Hildegarde took no notice of that. ''I wonder,'' she said, ''if you met a Mr. Mar up there?''

The woman looked at her husband, and he looked straight along his nose. It was a long nose, and it seemed to take him a great while to get to the end of it.

Hildegarde could n't wait. "Yes, Mr. Mar," she said eagerly, "Mr. Nathaniel Mar."

"I don't think—" began the woman.

"Oh, please try to remember. He is very thin and tall, with bushy hair. I feel sure you 'd remember him if you thought a moment. He is the kind people remember."

Something in the trembling earnestness of a person who looked as self-possessed as Hildegarde had its effect.

"You can know people up there pretty well and never hear their names. Nome is like that. I may have seen him."

Oh, how close it brought him to hear the dun-colored husband saying, "I may have seen him!"

"A young man?" asked the wife.

"No," said Hildegarde, and she was shaking with excitement. "He is gray, and he—he is very lame." This bald picture of her own drawing suddenly overcame her. "Try,"—she found herself catching at the rusty arm—"try to remember. He is my father."

"Oh, your father," said the woman in a different tone, and the vague man turned his pale eyes on Hildegarde as though only now fully aware of her.

"Lame! There was a lame man. No, I never spoke to him."

"We were n't much in Nome," the woman explained. "Our claims are out on Glaysher River, and we were at our camp there most of the time."

Hildegarde leaned against the brilliant dado of

Delicious Tomato Soup, and she looked so disheartened the man said, "Was you thinkin' o' goin' out?"

"Yes, I 'm going to him."

"Big party?"

"No, no party at all."

"You 're not goin' alone?"

"Yes, I 'm the only one of my family who has time."

The pale eye fell on Hildegarde's list, which she still had in her hand. "If your father 's there you won't have to take supplies."

"I must go prepared for—anything." And she turned her face away.

After a pause, "You got anybody to advise you?" said the man.

"No."

The rusty woman looked at the vague man, and the vague man looked at Van Camp's Soup.

"Where are you at?" he said presently.

Hildegarde stared.

He pushed back his black slouch hat and sadly mopped his yellow-gray brow. It was warm to-day. The crowd at Baumgarten's made it seem warmer still. "Which hotel?" asked Mr. Blumpitty.

"I 'm not at any hotel. I am at Mr. Jacob Dorn's."

"Jacob L. Dorn's?"

"Oh, do you know him?"

"No, I don't know him, but I know his firm." It was plain the name had impressed both Blumpittys.

"What boat you goin' in?" asked the yellow-gray man.

"The *Congress.*"

"Oh!"

"What 's the matter with the *Congress?*"

Blumpitty shook his head, murmured, "—pretty hot," and slowly divested himself of his overcoat. That done he stood revealed in black from head to heel. Something inexpressibly funereal about him now, that the dun-colored coat had masked. "Pity you did n't know about the *Los Angeles,*" he said dolefully.

"What is there to know about her?"

"She 's goin' to be fitted up in style."

"Oh, I shan't mind style."

"We 're goin' on the *Los Angeles,*" said the little wife.

"I do mind that—not going with you." Hildegarde looked into the woman's weather-beaten face, and felt regret deepen.

From columns of Van Camp Mr. Blumpitty raised his weary eyes and they fell on an acquaintance in the crowd. You saw that even the teeth of the dun-colored husband were yellow-gray. But the effect of his watery smile was altogether gray, and without suspicion of any hue less somber. It made you think of a dripping day in November, with winter all before you. But lo! it was the cheerful giant Blumpitty had recognized. How long had he been there at Hildegarde's elbow.

"What 's that I heard you sayin' against the *Congress?*" he demanded of Blumpitty. "*Congress* is the best boat goin'."

"We could n't get passage for all of us on the *Congress,*" said Blumpitty meekly.

"And we did n't want to be divided," contributed Mrs. Blumpitty.

"We 're sure the *Los Angeles* is all right."

"What makes you sure?"

"Becuz she 's just fresh from the Gover'mint service."

The giant laughed, and took out a big silver watch. Hildegarde saw with a start of surprise that it was past luncheon time.

"They *do* keep you hangin' around here." Blumpitty looked wearily at the crowd. "Guess I 'll go and make an appointment with Baumgarten for right away after breakfast to-morrer." He moved off with the giant at his side and the small wife at his heels.

Hildegarde hurried back to Madeleine's, where behold Mrs. Mar and Harry!

"The boys began to fuss when they read in the papers about Mr. Dorn being ill."

"Oh, it 's all right—about me, I mean," said Hildegarde.

"I told you it would be," Mrs. Mar said to Harry. "Now, here we are in a town where every hotel is full to overflowing, and Jacob Dorn dying—to judge by the way Madeleine behaves. But she always was a little theatrical—that girl."

"No, her husband is very ill. I feel I ought n't to be here myself, really." Obvious enough Hildegarde's dismay at the apparition of her family. Ignorant as she was, already she had learned how little help the average person could be about this undertaking. The Blumpittys were different. She told about them.

Mrs. Mar no sooner heard of their existence than she said: "Now, if you could travel with a respectable couple—" In vain Hildegarde pointed out she was going on another ship. Anyhow, those people could tell

Hildegarde things—they could advise. Anybody but Hildegarde would have had them here and pumped them well. The girl, in a subdued voice, reminded her mother that it was a house whose owner lay dangerously ill.

"The very reason! Mr. Dorn is n't advising you, as he promised. You must find some one who will. Oh, you *are* slow-witted! Where are those people staying with their foolish name? You don't even know their address? Well, upon my soul, it 's a good thing we did come, after all! How you 'll ever be able to get on by yourself, *I* don't know." In a trice Mrs. Mar had despatched Harry to scour Seattle, to ransack every hotel register in the place, "And don't come back here without those Blumpittys."

When, at four o'clock, there was no news either of Harry or them, Hildegarde and her mother set out together—having told the Japanese servant to keep anybody who called, as they 'd be gone only half an hour. If the Blumpittys, Mrs. Mar said, were not among the crowds in the principal street, they 'd very probably be on that water front Hildegarde had written about.

But no, not a Blumpitty to be seen. On their way home—the giant. "He might know—he 's a friend of theirs," Hildegarde said.

Without an instant's hesitation Mrs. Mar accosted him.

CHAPTER XV

"MY daughter thinks you know a man and his wife of the name of Blumpitty."

"Yes, ma'am," said the giant, pulling off his broad hat.

"Do you know where they are to be found?"

"I just now left Blumpitty up in the Stevens House bar."

"In the bar! The man drinks?"

"Oh, no, not to say *drinks,*" said the cheerful one, smiling broadly.

"What 's he doing in the bar then?"

"Just talkin' to the boys."

"Then will you go right away and ask him—"

"There 's Harry!" Hildegarde was making signals.

"Well, *you 're* not much good at finding people," his mother greeted him. "But we 've got Blumpitty."

"Oh, how d' you do," said Harry, prepared to accept the giant in this rôle. Hildegarde explained, and the final move in the mission was committed to her brother. The ladies were to go home and trust Harry to "bring Blumpitty along." They were reassured when they saw the giant disposed to accompany the expedition.

Within an hour, there was Blumpitty haled before Mrs. Mar, like a criminal before his judge.

"Well!" Mrs. Mar glanced from her son to the clock.

"And you would n't have found him even at this hour but for Hildegarde and me." Harry's answer to this (and to Hildegarde's, "Remember, we must speak low, Mr. Dorn's room is just above") was to whisper, as if divulging some tremendous secret, "Mr. Blumpitty." Then, still more significantly, *"My mother."* My mother fastened her bright eyes upon the stranger who had obliged her by responding to her call. Plainly she was not prepossessed. The giant had either been wrong, and Blumpitty *did* drink (in which case Mrs. Mar was wasting her time), or else the man naturally looked "logy"—a fatal way of looking.

"Please sit down, Mr. Blumpitty," said Hildegarde, speaking very low. Mr. Blumpitty, more than ever with the air of a mute at a funeral, deposited himself on the extreme edge of a chair.

"You see," said Harry, by way of breaking the chill of his mother's reception, "you see, Mr. Blumpitty was n't on any hotel register."

"Why were n't you?" demanded Mrs. Mar, as though this were a damning charge.

"No room anywhere," said Blumpitty sadly.

"Oh, I hope you found a place to sleep in—" began Hildegarde.

"Wa-al, yes, after huntin' around two whole days."

"Two days!" says Mrs. Mar, ready to nail him for a liar at the start, and so save time. "There 's a night in the middle of two days."

"Ya-as. We wished they wus n't."

"Where did you sleep?"

"Did n't sleep much."

"Where did you stay?"

"In the station."

"Station!" Visions of his being "run in" assailed Mrs. Mar. "What station?"

"The G. N. W.," he said indistinctly.

"The Great North Western Railroad Station," Harry translated, with a reassuring look at the man.

"You slept in the waiting-room?"

"Some of us slept."

"Oh, dear, I hope you 've got nice quarters at last?" said Hildegarde.

"Wa-al, we got three rooms. But," gloomier than ever, "we got to pay for 'em."

"What do you want of three?" demanded Mrs. Mar.

"Three ain't too many fur twenty-eight people."

"Twenty-eight! What are you doing with so many?"

"Takin' 'em to Nome." Had the destination been the nether regions, he could n't have said it more as one who had left hope behind.

"Bless my soul!" said Mrs. Mar, with a vision of the crowded train she 'd come by, and the yet more crowded streets she 'd hunted through for this same Blumpitty. "What are they all going to do there?"

Blumpitty smiled a faint world-weary smile. "They kind o' think they 'd jest natchrully like to get a share o' this gold that 's layin' around up there."

"Oh, you 're a prospecting party."

"I guess we 'll do some lookin' around."

"Twenty-eight of you!" exclaimed Hildegarde under her breath. "In three rooms!"

The man nodded slowly, and his yellow-gray eyes seemed to have a vision of them. "Layin' in rows," he said sadly.

"How dreadful!" breathed Hildegarde. In truth it had a morgue-like sound.

"No—o," he drawled. "No—o. Me and Mrs. Blumpitty, we do kind o' miss it, not havin' any winder. It 's only a closet though," he said, as if not wishing to hurt the feelings of anything so small and unpretentious. "And the rest of our people are all right. Some parties have had to mix up, but I been able to get a room for the men, *and*"—he spoke with a weary pride—"*and* one for the ladies."

"Ladies in your party!" exclaimed Harry.

"Ya-as. Five, not countin' Mrs. Blumpitty."

"What kind?" demanded Mrs. Mar, at the same moment as Harry asked, "What are *they* going to do up there?"

"Oh, they 're all right," said Blumpitty, thinking he answered both. "Miss Leroy Schermerhorn 's goin' to keep the books, and be secretary and business woman to the Company."

"What company?" says Mrs. Mar.

"Blumpitty & Co.," says Mr. Blumpitty.

"Bless my soul!" says Mrs. Mar.

"Remember Mr. Dorn," whispered Hildegarde.

"Do I understand your wife is going along—" Mrs. Mar began on a lower note.

"Yes, oh, yes. I could n't do it without Mrs. Blumpitty."

"Where does she come in?"

"Everywhere. Little bit o' woman, so high. You 've seen her." He turned to Hildegarde. She nodded, smiling. "Don't weigh more 'n ninety-six pounds. Worth twenty or'nary size people."

"What does *she* do up there?"

"Everything. Keeps it all together." He looked round with a melancholy wistfulness, as if he felt keenly the need of Mrs. Blumpitty to keep the present situation together.

"And the other women?" said Mrs. Mar.

"Well, Mrs. Tillinghast is the wife of the baker."

"What baker?"

"The Company's."

"Blumpitty & Co.'s?"

"Yes, ma'am. Then there 's Miss Cremer. She 's a tailor—goes along to keep us mended up till our clo'es get wore out. Then she 'll make us noo things. Mrs. Blumpitty had to do it all last year. Pretty heavy fur a little woman no bigger 'n—"

"The baker's wife and the tailoress, that makes two besides Mrs. Blumpitty."

"Yes, ma'am. An' there 's Miss Estelle Maris. Very nice young lady. She *says* she can cook." He sighed, and then recovered himself. "Even if she can't, Mrs. Blumpitty can. Yes"—he allowed a pale eye to wander toward Miss Mar—"we got very nice ladies along, and I mean 'em all to have claims."

Mrs. Mar glinted at him, as much as to say, "Oh, that 's the bait—poor wretches!"

"It 'll be very nice for them," said Hildegarde a little hurriedly.

"How do you expect them to get claims?" asked Mrs. Mar with severity.

"The Company 's got some valyerble property up on Glaysher Crick."

"What company has?"

"Blumpitty & Co."

"And are they giving claims away?"

He looked at Mrs. Mar, quite unruffled by her tone. "The Company 's got more 'n it can work. And the Company knows where there 's good property nobody 's taken up yet."

"Who 's in the Company?"

"Me and Mrs. Blumpitty, and her folks, and my folks, and most of our party."

"Oh, just a family affair," said Mrs. Mar, with a slighting intonation.

"Very few besides jest ourselves. We did n't want a lot of outsiders."

From Harry's covert smile you gathered this was a new view of the way to float a mining company. "Why don't you?"

"We seen what happens too often," said Blumpitty warily.

"What does happen?" asked Mrs. Mar.

"The people that 's the first to locate ain't often the ones that gets the benefit."

"Why don't they?"

"They get froze out. I mean to hold on to the bulk o' the stock myself jest as long 's ever I can. Keep things in my own hands." He looked anxious.

"Not let other people take up the stock, you mean?" inquired Harry, smiling openly now.

"It 's the only way," said Mr. Blumpitty, and then, as though to change a dangerous topic, "We got a nice party." He looked toward Hildegarde. "Pretty near all the perfessions. We got a smart young lawyer and two practical miners. We got a nengineer an' a noos-

paper man. An' we got a nex-motor man—used to drive a 'Frisco street car, and a very bright feller. Ya-as, we got a carpenter, too, an' three doctors an' a boat-builder an' a dentist. We got pretty near everything."

"How long were you up there before?" asked Mrs. Mar, still feeling her way with this queer character, who, with his wife, might after all be decent fellow-passengers for Hildegarde.

"We was in two summers an' one winter."

"Your wife, too?"

"Oh, yes, she kep' us alive. If y' wus to see her y' would n't think she looked like she—"

The discreet Jap servant opened the door, and seemed to whisper, "Mis' Bumble Bee."

"Oh, how do you do?" Hildegarde went quickly forward and shook hands with a tiny, weather-beaten woman.

"I heard on the water front you wus askin' for me," said the new-comer, looking very shy and embarrassed.

"Oh!" Mrs. Mar was on her feet. "Is this Mrs. Blumpitty?" Before that little person knew what had happened, she was on the other side of the room, shrinking into the extreme corner of a big, red satin sofa—not unlike some sort of insect hiding in the heart of a poppy. But it was idle trying to escape from Mrs. Mar. She prodded her prisoner with pointed questions, and there was no manner of doubt but "Mis' Bumble Bee" was intensely frightened. But she must have come out of the ordeal uncommon well, for the catechist rose at the end of a quarter of an hour (breaking in upon Harry's glib exposition of the huge difficulty in these days of floating a gold mining scheme). "Your wife and I have

been arranging things,'' said Mrs. Mar, with a suddenness that made Blumpitty blink. ''My daughter must go on your ship.''

''But, mama—''

''Mrs. Blumpitty says she will look after you on board.''

''Yes,'' agreed the rusty wife, a little breathless. ''And if she does n't find her father just at first she can stay with us, can't she?''

Blumpitty, thus appealed to, said, ''Ya-as,'' so entirely without enthusiasm, that his wife added, ''He said to me after we 'd talked with your daughter, 'It 's a pity she ain't goin' on the *Los Angeles.* We could 'a' helped her.' ''

''Well, she is going on the *Los Angeles.*''

''No, mama, the *Congress.*''

''Don't be pig-headed, Hildegarde. Why should you insist on the *Congress* when here are Mr. and Mrs. Blumpitty ready to look after you on the *Los Angeles?*''

''I don't exactly insist, but I 've paid $125—''

''You can change your ticket, if that 's all, can't she?'' Mrs. Blumpitty appealed to the repository of wisdom on the edge of the chair.

''Oh, ya-as,'' said Mr. Blumpitty.

''Why are you so sure?'' said Hildegarde. ''Is it because the *Congress* is so much the better boat, as your big, tall friend said?''

''He ain't right about that, though he 's a mighty smart feller. Been to Harvard College,'' he said, for Mrs. Mar's benefit. Then, as one adducing a destiny higher still, ''The *Los Angeles* has been a Manila transport.''

"But why does everybody seem to want to go in the *Congress?*"

"Sails four days earlier," said Blumpitty unmoved. "But"—he glanced, or no, Blumpitty never glanced; with apparent difficulty he rolled his pale eye heavily over to Mrs. Mar—"settin' out 's one thing, gettin' in 's another. 'T ain't likely the *Congress* 'll see Nome 'fore we do."

"Anyhow, what are four days compared to—?" Mrs. Mar turned briskly upon her daughter. "Mrs. Blumpitty is going to see that you have all the necessary things, and if you 're sick she 's going to look after you."

As Mrs. Blumpitty did not instantly corroborate this result of the fifteen minutes in the red satin corner, "You promised me that," said Mrs. Mar, with a suddenness that sounded less like maternal solicitude than truculence, "and *I* promised you should n't be a loser by it."

"Yes—oh, yes, ma'am, I 'll do all I said." Merely looking at Mrs. Mar seemed to galvanize Mrs. Blumpitty into heroic mastery of her shyness. She clasped her thin hands in their gray cotton gloves tightly together, and felt herself called upon instantly to prove her present knowledge and prospective usefulness.

"H-have y' got a boy's rubber coat, comin' to the knees?" she inquired of the younger lady.

"No," said Hildegarde. "Ought I—?"

"Yes, you must have that, must n't she?"

"Ya-as."

"And waterproof boots?"

"I 've got them."

"With asbestos soles?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"They 're the best."

"Get them," commanded Mrs. Mar.

"And one thing you can't do without is a blue denim prospecting dress."

"I think I have something that would do, though I don't expect to go—"

"Has your dress got knickerbockers and skirt to the knee?" She saw Miss Mar and her mother exchange glances, but she felt instinctively the elder lady would see the reasonableness of the provision.

"No," said the young lady, "my skirts are ankle-length."

"Ought n't to be a hairbreadth below the knee," said Mrs. Blumpitty, with more firmness than she had yet shown.

"No skirt at all is best," observed Mr. Blumpitty dryly.

"What!" said Harry Mar, whom every one had forgotten.

"Jest full knickerbockers," said Blumpitty, without so much as looking at the objector.

"Oh, that won't be necessary for me," said Miss Mar.

" 'T will, if you want to go prospectin'." Valiantly Blumpitty supported his wife's view. "You can't wear a skirt on the trail."

"I don't think I shall go on the trail," said the pusillanimous Hildegarde, "unless my father—"

"Better be ready," said Blumpitty.

"What else do you advise?" said Mrs. Mar, glancing at the clock.

"She ought to have a sou'wester, don't you think?" says Mrs. Blumpitty to Mr. Blumpitty.

"Ya-as, and a tarpaulin to lie on in the swamp."

"Well," said Mrs. Mar, "nobody can accuse you two of over-coloring the delights of life up there."

"It 's a splendid place, Alaska is, if you go with the right things," said Mrs. Blumpitty.

"And if you come away with the right things," supplemented Mrs. Mar.

"Oh, she must bring back a claim, must n't she?" Mrs. Blumpitty appealed to her husband.

Harry and his mother exchanged looks.

"Well, never mind about that," said Mrs. Mar. "But if you see after my daughter and do what you said, you won't be losers by it."

"No, indeed," said Harry, with emphasis.

"Mrs. Blumpitty," quoted Mrs. Mar, "Mrs. Blumpitty says she 'll see that Hildegarde is properly cooked for up there, and she 'll even get her washing done."

"Oh, yes, I can do that myself. I 'm used to it."

"You don't look very strong," said Hildegarde.

"I was n't before I went to Alaska," she answered proudly.

"Ya-as," agreed her husband. "Always terrible sickly till she went up there. Ruth 's jest the same."

"Who 's Ruth?" demanded Mrs. Mar.

"That 's my niece," said Mrs. Blumpitty.

"You had her along last year?"

"Yes, and she 's comin' again. She would n't miss comin' fur anything. Ruth 's twenty-five," Mrs. Blumpitty explained to Miss Mar. "Reel nice girl. Been a nurse. You 'll like Ruth."

It was as if the "reel nice" Ruth finally settled things.

"Give Harry your *Congress* ticket, Hildegarde, and he 'll see about changing it. Even if he can't, I 've made up my mind you must go on Mrs. Blumpitty's ship. Don't let the grass grow, Harry, we must catch the night train home."

When Harry had ceased to cultivate grass in Jacob Dorn's parlor, the Blumpittys seemed to think their audience, too, was at an end. They stood close together and muttered embarrassed leave-taking.

"Wait till my son gets back," interrupted Mrs. Mar. "He ought n't to be more than twenty minutes. There are one or two things I 'd like to know." The fact did not elude Mrs. Mar that when she had headed off their escape, Mrs. Blumpitty had taken refuge in the chair nearest her husband, and was edging it as close to him as she could conveniently get—for protection, it would appear. And Blumpitty himself, as feebly he resumed his perch, looked more than ever depressed and vague. Mrs. Mar needed no reminder that few husbands and wives are as communicative together as either may be apart. "Hildegarde," she said, "take Mrs. Blumpitty up to your room and see how much of your outfit 's right. Show her your list and take notes of what she tells you."

Having cleared the deck, Mrs. Mar by a cross fire of questions drew forth a story, no—queer fragments, rather, of the history of the Blumpittys' fight for existence during sixteen months spent in a tent upon the icy tundra, with a few Esquimau neighbors and no white soul for many a mile. Mrs. Mar forgot to look at the clock, even grew strangely friendly with Blumpitty, in

her absorption in so congenial an occupation as drawing out and clarifying an inarticulate, rather muddled male. Finally, "The papers," quoted Mrs. Mar, "the papers say that all the claims are staked."

Without the smallest emphasis, "I know that ain't so," said the man dully.

"How do you know?"

"I been there." Mrs. Mar digested this. "I know," Blumpitty went on, "a place where no white man but me and one other has set foot—rich in gold."

"Where 's that other man?"

"Under the tundra 'long o' the gold."

She tried not to betray her interest. She even succeeded. "And that 's the place you 're going up now to work?"

"No, ma'am, I ain't talked to folks about *that* place."

Mrs. Mar waited to hear why.

But Blumpitty seemed to have no intention of enlightening her. "The property we 're goin' to work this summer is the nineteen claims belongin' to Blumpitty & Co., up on Glaysher Crick. They 're already located, an' recorded, an' surveyed, an' a year's assessment work done."

"How much have people put into this company of yours?"

"Right smart," he said cryptically. "What with my folks and my wife's folks an' our party—had to give *them* a look in—only fair. But we 're goin' to keep it among ourselves 's much as possible. They ain't any of us rich, not *now*, but"—he smiled a pale, pale smile all to himself, that seemed to say the future was beyond peradventure golden. "We all been workin' people," he

said, grave again as ever. "But we 've all saved a little somethin'."

"And you 're putting your savings into this?"

"Every cent. We know $250 put into Blumpitty & Co.'s this spring 'll be a thousand 'fore long." Instead of rejoicing, he sighed. "We 've worked mighty hard, but we got our chance now." He rested on the thought a moment. "They 's a fortune fur us up on Glaysher Crick—'nough fur us all." His pale eyes seemed inadvertently to take in Mrs. Mar.

That lady presented her most baffling surface. Absolutely nothing you could take hold of. Whether her aspect discouraged Mr. Blumpitty or not, certainly he seemed to have no more conversation.

Mrs. Mar was obliged herself to break the silence. "So *you 're* pretty well satisfied, anyhow."

"Ya-as," he said, "if only I can keep out o' the hands o' the fy-nance-eers."

"What 's to prevent you?"

"Oh, I guess it 's all right"—but his look was dubious. "I got a good many mouths to feed an' a lot o' developin' to do."

"You mean you have n't got enough capital." She felt she had caught him. She was both disappointed and rather relieved.

"I got *some* capital, like I told you. An' I could get plenty more if I was n't so afraid o'—" He paused, and seemed to envisage afresh some subtle and merciless foe. Mrs. Mar's sharp eyes pecked him all over. If they had left a mark wherever they had been, Blumpitty would have presented no surface the size of a cent that was not pitted as with virulent smallpox. It might well

have inspired confidence that he bore up as well as he did.

"What is it you 're 'afraid' of?" demanded Mrs. Mar.

"Losin' personal control. But I 'm all right s' long 's I keep hold o' fifty-one per cent. o' the stock."

"Why fifty-one per cent.?" She must understand this.

"So 's to have the decidin' vote. So 's I can do the directin' myself. Watch it"—his pale eyes brooded—"an' manage it, an' make a reel success of it." You got the impression that the scheme was bound up not only with his fortune but with his pride. "If I 'm at the head o' the thing I can see that the 'riginal investors don't get froze out by the fy-nance-eers."

"Well, have n't you kept fifty-one per cent. of the stock?"

"Yes, I got more 'n that *now*. Blumpitty & Co. 's only jest started."

Mrs. Mar had a moment's thrill out of the sensation of being there "at the start." But she sternly repressed any glimmer of betrayal. "I suppose," she said, with an intention of irony, "that you 're ready to let in a few more private subscribers?"

"I 'm in favor o' lettin' in one or two." He fell into thought undisturbed by Mrs. Mar's silent pursuit, pecking here, pecking there. "I wus thinkin' I 'd like your daughter to have somethin'."

"Oh, my daughter 's putting all she has into her trip."

But Mr. Blumpitty was doing some more thinking. Gravely he brought out the result. "It ain't many young ladies would want to take that journey jest to nurse their fathers."

Mrs. Mar looked at him coldly. "She has n't got anything to invest in gold mines." And then she was sorry she had admitted this. If the man thought of Miss Mar —or, say Mrs. Mar—as a probable investor, it might make a difference.

But apparently quite unchilled, Mr. Blumpitty was drawling, "Wa-al, if she comes with us, I could very likely help her to locate a claim of her own."

Even that handsome offer seemed not to "fetch" Mrs. Mar.

And still he was not daunted. "I said to Mrs. Blumpitty, 'That 's the kind o' young lady I 'd like to help.' "

No sort of direct acknowledgment out of the young lady's mother. But presently, "Just at this juncture I want to give my daughter all I can spare, or I would n't mind putting something into your company myself."

You might think he heard only the end of the sentence. "It 's a good investment," he said.

"It 's quite possible that *later*—" Mrs. Mar threw in, feeling herself very diplomatic. "Just at present the only funds I have in hand are what my eldest son has sent to supplement his sister's."

"Ya-as, I wus thinking," said Blumpitty, as though in complete agreement, "when she buys her stuff at Baumgarten's she 'd better get it through me, and then she 'll pay only wholesale rates. That 'll be a savin'. I could save her freight charges, too."

"Is n't she getting wholesale rates anyhow?"

"No. They won't make no difference fur a little six weeks' order for one person. I 'm gettin' food and camp

outfit fur twenty-eight people fur two years. They make a reduction fur that."

It seemed reasonable; and really, these simple people were disposed to be very serviceable.

She thought of Trenn's brotherly letter of good-by and his handsome contribution of $300, reposing at that instant in the yellow bag that hung at her belt. Well, suppose she used "the money for Hildegarde" in a double sense. Suppose she got some stock in Hildegarde's name. It was all my eye about Blumpitty's wanting to help "that kind of young lady" just because she—fudge! Mrs. Mar was "from Missouri!" But it very probably *would* help the girl with her new friends that they should look upon her as financially interested in their enterprise—should think of her obliged and grateful family as a probable source of further revenue. Odd if it were Mrs. Mar after all who should be the cause of the Mar family's profiting by the gold discovery at Nome. But she would do nothing upon impulse.

"I think I could send you two or three hundred before you sail," she said.

Mr. Blumpitty looked on the floor, and made no manner of response.

"How would that do?" and she repeated the offer.

"I can't promise they 'll be any o' the margin left by the time we sail."

"Why can't you?"

"Wa-al, I got to keep fifty-one per cent. fur myself."

She 'd heard all that. "How much a share is your stock?"

"It 's only $25 now. But I guess it won't ever be as low again. This time next year—" He felt for his

watch. When he saw what time it was this year, slowly he pulled his slack figure together and stood up.

"You 're going to wait—" began Mrs. Mar.

"I promised t' meet a man about now."

"Somebody who wants to join your company?" said Mrs. Mar, with a pang.

"I guess so."

"I *could* take twelve shares to start with, only—"

"I guess y' better talk it over with y' son." Blumpitty had stooped and was feeling under the chair for his hat.

"It is n't that," said Mrs. Mar a little sharply, for the idea of taking counsel with her son appealed to her much less now that Blumpitty recommended it. "But I 'm not sure I won't have to buy a second ticket for my daughter."

"No danger o' that."

"And how do I know there 's a good berth left on your steamer?"

"I got twenty-eight first-class accommodations. The young lady can have the pick o' them." He seemed to be coming slowly toward Mrs. Mar with a motion of offering his hand, whether to reassure her as to the solemnity of his given word on the subject of the berth, or in mere good-by.

She arrested him with her eye. "If I get my daughter these twelve shares"—Mrs. Mar's hand was on the yellow bag—"I do it on my own responsibility. I shall not consult my sons."

"Wa-al, it 's a good chance," he admitted, but in the tone of one not disposed to deny that "all flesh is grass." "I 'd like your daughter to have her share. They ain't

many young ladies would want to take that journey jest to—''

''You 'd better make out a receipt for those twelve shares straight away, before anybody comes in and interrupts.'' Mrs. Mar opened the yellow bag.

Blumpitty looked vaguely at the floor. ''I don't know as I got any blanks along.''

''Blanks! I don't want any blanks.''

''Certificate forms.''

''Oh—well, look and see,'' she said peremptorily, with her glance at the clock.

Out of his breast pocket Blumpitty slowly took some papers. ''Only a dirty one,'' he said sadly.

''Well, fill it out. There 's pen and ink on that table.'' She was counting bills on her lap.

Blumpitty stood vaguely looking round in a lost sort of way, just as though time were n't priceless and Harry's return at any moment likely to complicate, if not checkmate, ''the deal.''

''Here.'' Mrs. Mar jumped up and put a chair in front of the little writing-table. Then smartly she tapped the silver-topped ink-bottle, as though she doubted his having the sense to know what it was unless she made some sort of demonstration in its neighborhood. She even illustrated the fact that the lid lifted up. Slowly Blumpitty had come over to the spindle-legged table, and now sat in a heap in front of it, looking into the ink. Mrs. Mar whisked a pen out of the rack and pushed it into Blumpitty's slow fingers. ''And here in this envelop is $300.'' She took it out and counted it over, under his dull eyes. ''But I 'll keep it till Harry comes back and says it 's all right about the ticket. We

Hildegarde's mother and Mr. Blumpitty

can just exchange envelops without saying anything further. Understand?'' She felt a well-nigh irresistible impulse to shake Blumpitty, but instead of doing that, there she was signing a paper, after taking care to read it twice, in spite of the pressure of time. And now, although she still held both this document and the three hundred dollars in her own hands, she was conscious of qualms.

''I suppose you 'll be sinking a deal of good hard money in that creek of yours this summer, whether you get any out or not.''

''They 's plenty of work there,'' he said, foggier than ever, ''but I got more 'n that to do this summer.''

''What do you mean?''

He looked at her with that curious sort of vagueness that gives one an impression of hearing a man talk in his sleep. You feel it would be unfair to hold him quite responsible. ''When I 've got the work started all right on Glaysher, I got to take two or three people I c'n trust an' go up to a place northwest o' Nome.''

''What place?''

''Polaris.''

''What do you want to go there for, when you 've got nineteen claims to look after on Glacier—''

''Them nineteen claims is valyerble property, and Blumpitty & Co. 's goin' to pay handsome dividends. This time next year—''

''Well, what do you want more than that?''

He paused, and then in that same somnambulist tone, ''I wus n't lookin' fur it,'' he said, ''I jest tumbled on it.''

''What?''

"A great big thing up by Polaris. Bigger 'n anything Blumpitty & Co. have got on Glaysher. Bigger 'n anything any company 's got anywhere."

Impossible to think a man boastful or even over-sanguine, who spoke so wearily, with yellow-gray face so unlit, with air and attitude so joyless. "It 'll make millionaires of a good many people."

There was silence in Jacob Dorn's parlor. Mrs. Mar had refused to credit a story of this sort once before. Her unbelief had not only cost her a great fortune; it had cost her happiness. She sat in silence, reflecting. But she gave no sign.

"People have got so 's they don't take much stock in any feller's talkin' 'bout the Mother Lode. I don't blame 'em myself."

"It turns out as stupid sometimes to be too skeptical as to be too credulous," quoth Mrs. Mar.

Mr. Blumpitty did not applaud the sentiment. He looked sadly at the lady and then, as though the effort to hold up his eye-lids were too great, he rested his heavy eyes on the silver rim of the ink-pot. "Everybody knows they must *be* a Mother Lode some'ers around up there."

"Why must there?"

"Wa-al, *I* don't know," said Blumpitty impartially. "P'raps the gold come down from Heaven."

"Don't talk nonsense."

"Well, if it don't come from Heaven, the gold they 're findin' at Nome an' in the Klondike, and the noo camps —all the loose placer gold o' the North," he reflected, "if it ain't come down from Heaven, it 's been washed an' weathered and glayshered out o' some reef or range, or great natchrul store-house."

"Yes. I 've read about that."

He nodded faintly. "Ya-as, that 's what they all say. Every man *believes* in a Mother Lode. But what no man likes to believe is that another man 's found her."

Again silence.

Vivid description would have failed to picture for this particular auditor what Blumpitty's slow and clumsy words conveyed as though by chance. So little did he play the game in the usual way that Mrs. Mar felt the satisfaction of the discoverer in getting at the story through barriers and in despite of veils.

In the silence, up above—in Jacob Dorn's sick chamber—some one was heard opening the window.

"And you think," Mrs. Mar spoke very low, "you think you know where the Mother Lode is?"

"Pretty near every miner in the Northwest *thinks* he knows."

"You mean you are sure?"

"I 'm forty-eight," said Blumpitty mournfully. "It 's twenty years since I liked sayin' I was sure."

"But" (he was the sort of man that needed reassuring) "you 've got good ground for believing—" She waited.

"Last fall"—he looked round the red satin room as though for possible haunts of eavesdroppers, and then he further interrupted himself—"you must n't think I found it myself," he said modestly. "I got a tip—a straight tip."

"From the man that 's dead."

"Ya-as. Leastways, they said he had n't more 'n a few days to live. Ya-as, dyin' up there at Polaris!

Everybody in the camp knoo he 'd struck it rich. Nobody could find out where."

"How did they know he 'd struck—"

"Becuz he wus so secret about everything. Where he 'd come from., Where he wus goin' if he got well, and most of all"—Blumpitty looked round and sunk his low voice—"where he got his nuggets and dust from."

"Oh, he *had* nuggets—"

"Yes, nuggets and dust, too. Good and plenty."

"He showed it to you?"

"No. He wus terrible secret about it. Terrible afraid somebody 'd rob him. Kind o' sick you know about it." Slowly Blumpitty tapped his yellow-gray forehead. "But he allowed he 'd found something worth while an' he never let his bundle o' dust out o' sight. Day an' night he kep' it jest under his hand. Everybody nosin' around, tryin' to be friends with him. One day I wus passin', an' his dawg went fur me. I picked up a stone. 'Don't y' do it,' he calls out o' the sod cabin, where he wus layin' with the door open. 'Don't y' do nothin' to that dawg,' he says. I explained the dawg wus doin' things to me. 'Come in here,' he said, 'an' she won't touch you.' So I did, an' we talked a while."

"Well?"

He asked me kind o' sarcastic, was I 'lookin' fur the Mother Lode?' I said I guessed I wus n't no different from other men, except that I wus n't hangin' round a sick man fur to get his secrets out o' him. 'No,' he said, 'I ain't never seen you hangin' round.' An' then he told me."

"What?"

"I says, 'I 'm figurin' on findin' the Mother Lode up in them hills yonder.' 'That 's right,' he said, an' his eyes wus kind o' wild an' glassy. 'Up over yonder?' I said. 'Yes,' says he; 'up North. That 's where the Mother Lode is.' An' I think from what he said, he 'd called his discovery-claim 'The Lode Star.' "

"What made you think—"

"Course he wus kind o' queer—out of his head, y' know, fur he called it the 'Mother Lode Star.' An' he wus terrible secret about it. All the time gettin' away from the subject and talkin' about the dawg."

"Well—"

"Wa-al, they wus n't more 'n half a dozen people at Polaris then, an' nobody 'd found anything to make a boom out of. But they all hung on. And they made presents to that feller, took him grub regillar. An' other folks kep' comin' jest becuz that man wus there. An' they all knoo he 'd struck it rich. An' they all knoo he wus dyin'. That was what they wus waitin' for. I did n't wait, even them few days they said he had to live. The snow wus beginning t' fly an' I had to go back to Glaysher and get Mrs. Blumpitty an' our party out before navigation closed. But I said to myself, 'I 'll risk it—fur the Mother Lode!' An' I did. Went up over the hills to the north, in a bee line from that cabin o' his till I come ter—" Blumpitty's voice dropped still lower and he hesitated, while, like one who scarce dares move lest he break some spell, slowly he looked round, and seemed to forget how to turn back. He remained so, sitting awry, listening.

"It 's only some one moving about in Mr. Dorn's room overhead. You found the Mother Lode?"

He found he was able to twist himself back by dint of drawing out his watch. "When I get t' thinkin' about it I clean forget the time." He stood up. "I guess I got t' be goin'."

Footsteps and low subdued voices in the hall. Hildegarde had seen her brother from an upper window, and had come down with Mrs. Blumpitty to let Harry in.

There would be no trouble in selling "Berth 21" for the third time.

Mrs. Mar, about to hand an envelop to Mr. Blumpitty, wondered to herself, "How much of a fool am I? Well, I have n't done fool-things all along the line, like most people. If I must commit foolishness before I die, I 'll do it all in a lump and be done with it." Whereupon she handed Mr. Blumpitty the envelop. He seemed to be giving Harry his address. Mrs. Blumpitty was making an appointment to meet Miss Mar "at ten o'clock to-morrow, at Baumgarten's."

For the third time Mrs. Mar was reading through a paper she held in her hand. When she came to the ill-written signature, "How do you spell your name?" she demanded of Mr. Blumpitty.

"B-l-u-m-p-i-t-t-y," said the gentleman mournfully.

"Humph," said Mrs. Mar, head on one side and eyes fixed so critically on the name that Mrs. Blumpitty hastened to the defense. "It 's French," says she.

"French!" echoes Mrs. Mar. "How do you make that out?"

"Well, that 's what his grandmother always told him. She said it was originally Blank Peed." Wherewith, having vindicated the family, she shook hands and led the way out. Harry was opening the outside door for

them. No one spoke above a whisper, on account of Mr. Dorn.

"Good-by, Mr. Blumpitty."

"Good-by, ma'am."

"Look here"—Mrs. Mar detained him for a last aside —"you 've got twenty-eight people to see after, and a company to manage, and nineteen claims to develop, why can't you be content with that?"

He looked at her. "Would you be?" he asked simply.

Her face told tales. "You mean"—she hesitated— "if I 'd got on the track of the Mother Lode?"

"Jest so," said Blumpitty, and slowly he followed his wife out of the Great Importer's house.

CHAPTER XVI

HILDEGARDE learned other things the next morning besides how to do your marketing for two years in an hour. She brought away from Baumgarten's the renewed impression that Mrs. Blumpitty was a person of some practical sense, and that Mr. Blumpitty, though he might be an authority upon the Mother Lode and an estimable character to boot, did in reality himself need a good deal of looking after. It is impossible to say just how the "unlogical" feminine mind—in this case young and ignorant as well—may arrive at so definite a conclusion out of a small assemblage of apparently trifling data. For Hildegarde's judgment was not founded merely upon the outer man. Nor was it contributed to very largely by Mr. Blumpitty's indifference to small economies, as shown in his readiness to order gallons of expensive "olive" when cotton-seed oil was as cheap as wholesome to cook with, and Mr. Blumpitty convicted by his wife of inability to detect any difference in taste. It was not merely that Mrs. Blumpitty was the one to offer reasons why methylated spirit, though cheap on the bill, was dearer in actual use than alcohol. It was not that he had forgotten after sixteen months' experience, "what a cravin' you get up there fur sweet and fur sour," and what a failure the California dried fruit had turned out the year before. *Had* he complained he

could n't eat such insipid stuff till Mrs. Blumpitty had "livened" it with a dash of vinegar as well as sugar and spice? Wa-al, p'raps he had!

"You must n't give me dried apples from any place nearer here than Michigan," said Mrs. Blumpitty.

The Baumgarten Brother had smiled a little, and said, "She knows."

The upshot of the morning was to give Hildegarde an inkling that the chief use of Mr. Blumpitty, so far as she was concerned, might be that he would keep her family soothed by the illusion that this respectable man, pledged to her service, was "going to see that everything was all right." For the rest, should she not perhaps do well to imitate his spouse, and not expect any one to be wide awake in her interest who was half asleep before his own? Although he had said, "Ya-as, it 's all right about the ticket," Miss Mar interviewed the steamship people on her own behalf. "Quite right!" they indorsed Mr. Blumpitty's account of the matter. And as to the berths, Mr. Blumpitty already had twenty-eight, and had sent word he wanted a twenty-ninth, "a pertickler good one fur a lady." "Noospaper woman I presoom," said the agent politely. It seemed to be only the press that inspired such respect. She was more glad than ever of the offer that had come that morning from Eddie Cox, editor, now, of the "San Miguel Despatch." "Yes," she told the agent, "I am to be a Regular Correspondent." In all sorts of ways she saw her status incomparably improved by falling in with Eddie Cox's suggestion. It appeared to be necessary to stand well with a "noospaper" woman. "What accommodation can I have?"

"Why, the best we got."

"Is there much choice?"

"We put you down here, with Mr. Blumpitty's party." A number was indicated.

"I 'd like to see the cabin."

"*See* it?"

"Yes, before I decide."

Impossible. If she did n't take and pay for the berth now, in an hour it would be in other hands. But seeing her quite unhustled by this horrid alternative, the agent said he would make a great, an unheard-of exception in her case, and promised to take her over the ship as soon as the *Los Angeles* came up from Tacoma, where she was being elaborately refitted, "new paint, electric light, everything." It would be a pity for a "noospaper" woman to go in any meaner vessel.

The crowds that composed the sailing list besieged the offices day by day, wildly impatient at the date of departure being "a little postponed" while the *Los Angeles* was further embellished for their reception. "Style 's all very well. But gettin' there 's the thing."

And among them this girl, with only half her ticket paid for, coming in twice a day to keep track of events.

At last, after a night of riot, when the office was very nearly pulled about the company's ears, all Seattle knew that the much-heralded steamer had been brought up from Tacoma and was at the Seattle wharf. The crowds on the water front could see her, glaring and white and respect-inspiring, but guarded like the gate of Paradise.

"Let 's go and see our quarters," Hildegarde suggested, meeting Mr. Blumpitty in the street.

"Wish we could," said Blumpitty sadly. "No one allowed aboard till sailin' time, nine o'clock to-morrer."

Hildegarde spoke of the agent's promise.

"Promise! Oh, yes, promise anything." And Blumpitty moved gloomily away in the crowd.

Hildegarde found the agent without loss of time. He was overwhelmed with work. Did n't she see!

What she saw was a clay-faced individual, with a slight bulge in one lean jaw where he stored his tobacco—red-eyed, unwashed, and obviously irritated by her reappearance. His promise—quietly she insisted. The anæmic visage twitched, and he attended to another customer. But she stood waiting, and she looked as if she were prepared to camp there till she 'd had her way. Oh, these women! They wus always like that—fussin' and naggin' and goin' on!

He attended to two other customers. *They* did n't expect such things of him. But there she still stood with her eyes fixed upon the agent, blockin' up the way, waitin', waitin'. "What 'd I do if they all expected me to go runnin' round the wharves with 'em!" he demanded in an angry undertone.

"You promised," she began, glancing at the fact that there were three other clerks in the office.

"Mr. Blumpitty 's satisfied!" he said severely, pointing out the lamentable contrast. And he 'd taken her for a lady. A lady would believe a gentleman when he told her it was all right—and not worry him. But though she must have seen plainly how she was still further lowering the agent's lofty ideal of how a lady should behave, there she stood looking at him with a grave steadiness that held no hope of her yielding her point. "Prom-

ise! promise!''—why, it was damned good-natured of him to make a promise, but to expect him to— He bent toward her. ''Look yere,'' he said in an angry whisper, ''I ain't got a special permit yet.''

''I 'll wait till you get it.''

''Can't have it yere before three.''

''Very well, I 'll come at three, but you must please not disappoint me again, or else I—'' He jerked away. As he saw her going out—Now what did she mean?—''or else she—'' You never know what pull these noospaper women have got.

He had forgotten all about her when— O Lor! There she was upon the stroke, like fate.

Well, well, did she promise not to tell none o' the rest o' the passengers? All right, then. Come ahead.

He led the way to the docks with every circumstance of secrecy; dodging through back streets, lying to acquaintances as to where he was going, and gradually growing cheerfuller, pausing to exchange humorous asides with friends along the wharf. Hildegarde, waiting, silent, patient, during these passages, was entirely aware of the curious looks bent upon her, and saw that her expedition with this little rat of a man was held by some to have a ''larky'' aspect (save the mark!). She saw it was incredible to these people that the agent should take this trouble for any other reason than that she was an attractive young woman who had smiled upon this poor little drink-sodden creature, and was giving him the rare sensation of being ''a sad dog with the ladies.'' Even playing at the idea had quite transformed the agent. Poor little misery! She knew instinctively she had nothing to fear from him, and even if he had been a different type she had no doubt but

what she would have known how to keep him in his place when they were alone. But before these pals of his the agent put on sly looks, carried himself rakishly, and tipped his hat very far back on his head. Well, it was an odd world evidently, but Hildegarde Mar had come out to see it. Now, after various formalities, they were going on board.

"See! paint 's wet yet. That 's why I did n't want y' to come. Spoil y' clo'es, sure 's a gun." Apparently tomorrow the paint would be dry as a bone. Past the strangely few decent, though cramped, staterooms of the first saloon, each ticketed with the names of prospective occupants, down into the dim region of the second saloon, down into the intermediate, further down, clinging on to ladders, down, down, into the bowels of the ship, Hildegarde and the ferret-faced agent went, looking for Mr. Blumpitty's quarters. And lo! though that gentleman had paid for first-class accommodation—as the agent admitted—he 'd been "glad to get the only accommodation left," and that was in the hold! The twenty-nine berths were twenty-nine sections of deal shelves, ranged in tiers five deep, and set so close one on top of the other you could not believe it possible for a good-sized man to insert his body between the unsheeted ticking of his chuck-mattress and the board above his head. Hildegarde stood stooping in the awful hole and staring as one not crediting her eyes.

"It 'll look better," says the agent, a little shamefaced, "when the beds are made. The company supplies a piller each, and a pair o' blankets."

No ventilation. No light of day. One electric burner to illumine the horror of the gloom.

"You don't mean to say—" began Hildegarde, turn-

ing such a look upon the agent that he said hurriedly: "No, no. This won't do for a noos—fur a lady." And they climbed the ladders back to day.

He found the lady up-stairs quarters on the saloon deck.

"But there are only five berths here."

"Best cabin on the ship," said he, spitting with decision through the port.

"But on this card on the door there are five names already."

"One 's comin' out," and he saw to that by the simple process of drawing an indelible pencil across "Miss Tillie Jump," and substituting "Miss H. Mar."

Still the young lady studied the card. "Look at this."

He looked.

"Here, at the very top."

"Don't see nothin'."

"You don't see *Mr.* and Mrs. David M. Jones."

"Oh, yes, I see them."

"Surely that 's a mistake."

"Mistake? No. I 'tended to them folks myself." As the young lady stared incredulous, he reassured her. "They 're comin' all right. Tip-top folks. He wus governor of—"

"They 're not coming in here?"

"Why not?"

"*Mr.* Jones?"

"Yes, David M. He wus governor of—"

"In here, with all these—ladies!"

"Well, one 's his wife. Don't you be afraid. *He 's* all right."

"He can't possibly come in here."

"He 's got to. No other place. Him an' his wife wus almost the first passengers on the list."

"Well, give them a cabin to themselves."

"Oh, see here! There ain't room fur no style like that on *this* trip."

"Then put back Miss Jump and take out Mr. Jones."

She saw the agent blink at such cool juggling. "Mr. Jones must go in a man's cabin," she explained.

"Don't you know they 're all full?"

"He can't come in here," said the young lady inflexibly.

"He 's got to, that 's all there is about it. I can't go playin' no monkey tricks with David M. Jones."

"Then please find me some other place."

"Ain't I already told you? They ain't no—"

"You mean you can't, after all, accommodate me on this ship?"

"Lord! Lord!" The agent seemed to pray for patience and for light.

"You were prepared to make Miss Tillie Jump—" and in spite of herself, gravity went by the board. But the agent's smile was wan.

"That was different," he assured her. "Well, here goes!" With the air of one who has cast the last shred of prudence to the winds, he wrote out a new card from which you might gather that David M. Jones had not been reëlected for this berth. And so, exit the former governor!

"*Now* you can't say we ain't done everything."

"Thank you," said Hildegarde. "There 's only one thing more. I should like to bring my steamer trunk in to-day and get settled."

The agent gaped, and then, with a gesture of comic feebleness before the spectacle presented by this young lady, he sat down on the edge of the berth labeled, "T. Jump," and grinned.

"The paint 's nearly dry up here," urged Miss Mar. as one meeting the only possible objection.

It must be because she was on a "noospaper." Nothing else could give a woman a nerve like this. Well, it was positively refreshin'! Out of pure gaiety of heart the agent added a little new tobacco to the store already accumulated in his cheek. " 'T ain't a bad idear," he said. "More 'n you 'd like to try it on. But it would n't hardly do."

"Why?"

"Make a nawful rumpus." As still she seemed not to understand the enormity of her proposal. " 'T would n't be fair to let some and not let others."

She could see that. "But why not let them all?"

"Oh, haw! haw!" The thing was somehow deliciously comic. But a compromise might be possible— "fur a noos—" Luckily the purser happened to be on deck. Hildegarde, to her stark astonishment, heard the agent reply confidentially to some question, "Well, y' would n't think so, but from one or two things she let drop, I guess she 's one o' ——'s hustlers, an' special correspondent fur the 'New York Herald,' I guess, an' Gawd knows what else." She was forthwith presented to Mr. Brown, and it was arranged that the "noospaper" woman should send her baggage down to the purser's care, and herself be allowed to come on board a couple of hours before the mob—say at seven o'clock in the evening.

At a quarter before that hour the street near the wharf where the *Los Angeles* lay was dense with packed humanity. So much time and tact it took to worm one's way through the mass, that Madeleine, who had come down to see her friend off, began to despair. Already she had been longer away from her invalid than she had meant. Hildegarde urged her to turn back now. Madeleine looked about with anxious eyes. "It 's worse even than I imagined. It 's terrible to leave you here."

"It 's much more terrible for you to leave Mr. Dorn."

Madeleine did n't deny that.

"And if you come further there 's no telling *when* you 'll get out. It will be worse going back against the tide."

But Madeleine hesitated, with harassed face.

"I 'd much rather you went now," Hildegarde urged, taking her suit-case from her friend. "Good-by."

Madeleine clung to her with filling eyes. "I *hate* leaving you."

Hildegarde kissed her. "Good-by, dear. And thank you a thousand times."

In the act of going, Madeleine whispered, "Oh, I *hope* nothing will happen to you. But I 'm frightened to death. Good-by. Oh *dear!*"

And that was the last of the old familiar life.

As slowly Hildegarde got herself and her suit-case through the crowd, it was borne in upon her that perhaps she had been wrong to insist that neither of her brothers should come and see her off, as each had nobly suggested, in spite of their unwavering opposition to the

enterprise. She had made a point of their trusting her "to do it alone."

Besides, she was n't alone. In every letter she flourished the Blumpittys. Where were those Blumpittys now? No sign of them since yesterday. Anyhow, she had prevented the boys from coming. Her fear, not of course formulated to them, had been that if they came, somehow, at the last moment they would try to prevent her going. Well—she looked about—they probably would. She pressed on, inwardly exulting, outwardly modest and asking pardon. And all the time she kept a sharp lookout, as if, in spite of everything, she was expecting some one. A Blumpitty? Not a bit of it.

"It 's no use," said a red-faced man, with a wheezy voice, "not a *bit* o' use yer tryin' to get through yere."

"There would be," said the young lady, "if you helped me a little."

That was different. But, "Ye 'll only get to stand a yard or two further on till nine o'clock. They would n't open them gates fur President McKinley."

"I want to see if my baggage got here all right. I sent it hours and hours ago."

"Same bright idear 's occurred to the rest of us," said a sharp-faced youth. But they let the young lady pass. And in the uncertain light they looked after the tall, striking figure, dressed in close-fitting dark green, wearing a perfectly plain green felt hat, which was somehow more distinguishable and more distinguished set upon a head like that than if it had been furbelowed after the fashion of the other feminine headgear that flowered and feathered in the throng. Public opinion would have set

her down as "stuck up," from the way she carried herself, had it not been for something too gentle in the face to support that view. The delicately molded chin, with the end softly turned up, gave an almost childish look to the face, and the long-lashed eyes, at once eager and abstracted, why were they always looking, looking? "Lost her party, I guess."

On she went, changing her suit-case from one tired hand to the other, looking here, looking there, just as she had done in the Seattle streets. She had gone about all these last days consciously braced for a final encounter with Cheviot—a last attempt on his part to make her abandon the undertaking. That, of course, was the reason he had not written, nor even telegraphed, to say good-by. There was nothing surly, or even sullen, about Cheviot. Though they had parted "like that," he would n't be willing she should go without his making some sign. Not having done so could only mean— Oh, she knew what it meant.

She dramatized the coming scene—saw herself being "quite firm," defeating, utterly routing him. But in order to carry out the program she must n't let him take her by surprise. And as now over this shoulder, now over that, she scrutinized the faces in the crowd, she felt her heart beat as she thought of the coming conflict. And the pink color rose in her face. She had been afraid "the boys" might want to turn her back. In her heart of hearts she was afraid that Louis, in some way not clearly foreseen, would succeed. She went forward with the sense of one escaping from a definite peril. At last, rather out of breath, she dropped her suit-case before the door of the brightly lighted bag-

gage-room. Just inside was a man in his shirt-sleeves, and beyond him—

"*There 's* my trunk!" she cried out, with the cheerful air of one descrying a valued friend.

"Want it checked?"

"Yes, please."

"Where 's it goin'?"

"To Nome, of course," answered Hildegarde, panting a little and straightening her hat. "Nobody is going anywhere else, are they?" she added, a little impatient at the man's staring and delay.

"N-no. I guess not. But—" He grinned good-humoredly. "I did n't think you looked like a Nomer."

Here was a blow at the very start. Hildegarde glanced down at her plain clothes, and decided the man was mistaken. But he checked her trunk, her provision-box, her bag, her deck-chair, and her roll of wraps, and she, declining to give up the suit-case, turned about to make her way among the people, massed thicker than ever in this direction. For over yonder, hidden by the crowd, was the gate whose opening would give access to the *Los Angeles*. Progress here more difficult than ever.

Courage! Now if Louis were somewhere in the crush, if those critical blue-gray eyes were on her, he would be wondering to see how well she made her way, keeping her footing and her temper, gaining inch by inch her goal. She went the more unflinching as under the gray-blue eye. When it became obvious that this pink and white gentle-looking girl was intent, if you please, on working her way to the barrier in front of people who had been there an hour, she was treated to an experience of unyielding backs, sharp elbows, and surly looks. Why

should n't she wait her turn? Yes, Hildegarde reflected, it was natural they should feel that, especially the women. Why, how many women there were! But no Mrs. Blumpitty, and no— Hildegarde looked at her watch. How the time had flown. It really was rather odd about Cheviot. He might, of course, come still later, but suppose he did n't. It was almost incredible, and yet—

If he did come, he 'd see, at all events, there were some quite nice-seeming women here. But perhaps they were n't going. This one, with the white, white face under the orange hat—what little young voice was that beside her? Why, the woman was holding a boy by the hand. He reminded Hildegarde of Cheviot's small nephew, Billy. She smiled down into the solemn little face. "Are you seeing some one off?"

"Nop!" said the Curlyhead sturdily. "Goin' to Nome meself." And the crowd cheered. Either that demonstration frightened him, or he was tired and indifferent to popular approval. He began to fret and then to whimper. Was it his father who spoke so roughly and so thickly? Curlyhead's whimper blossomed into wailing. His father began to shake him.

"Oh, wait a minute," said the tall young lady, as if meaning only to delay the operation for a second. She set down the suit-case on her own toes, and out of a pocket in the close-fitting green jacket came a cake of chocolate, all glorious in silver foil. Hildegarde held it before the child's distorted little face. The features righted themselves as by magic. The youngest pioneer no longer took a gloomy view of his prospects.

The father 's been drinking heavily, Hildegarde said

to herself as she went on. Poor wife. Poor little boy. She would know Curlyhead better on the ship.

How strange if Louis were to harbor such deep resentment as not to write and not to appear. That *he* should be the only one of her familiar circle that had not to be dissuaded from coming to see her off! If suddenly now in the crowd she should see him she would be almost glad. After all, he could n't prevent her sailing. What was he thinking of to let her go off like this, without— Had her mother been right? Just then a woman, in a sealskin jacket and with diamonds twinkling in her ears, not only refused flatly to let Hildegarde pass but angrily admonished the men about her to stand firm.

The tall young lady only changed her course a little, and made obliquely for the barrier, but the encounter with that woman affected her more unpleasantly than the elbowing and jostling of the others. She had a distinct vision of Louis Cheviot's face as he had said "the kind of woman that goes to Nome." It had been horrible to him that Hildegarde was not daunted. For she had n't let him see that she was. And now that woman, with the hard face and the diamond ear-rings!—and Louis too disgusted to want to come and see his old friend off, or even to send her a message of good-by.

She began to see how foolish it was to expect to see him here. He had washed his hands of her.

And still, in the back of her head, she thought he might come—even built upon it. She looked back. No, he was n't in sight; but a tall, grizzled man had given the youngest pioneer a seat on his shoulder. That was nice of the grizzled man.

But it was saddening to go on so great a journey without the good-will of so close a friend as—

There was something very hard about Louis. He could enjoy himself quite comfortably, since he had washed his hands of her. Her mother—(why was this man in front of her dressed in oilskins?) Yes—washed his hands of her. Her mother had told her as much. Bella and Mrs. Wayne had come up from the country to the Valdivia G. H. Charity Ball. They had stayed at the great new hotel. Bella had worn pink at the ball, and danced constantly with Louis Cheviot. She stayed on for several days, and they drove together every evening. People had begun to talk. Well, it had seemed very possible once. Why not? And here was Hildegarde actually expecting he might have left Bella and come all that way from Valdivia just to wish Hildegarde God-speed on a journey he had loathed the very mention of. Idiocy. Of course he was out driving with Bella this soft, beautiful evening. He would be thinking: "Bella could never do anything so unfeminine as to go to a horrible place like Nome!" Bella and Louis. Why did she, the girl struggling here in the crowd, feel this half-incredulous aching at the thought? Bella and Louis. Natural enough. Even inevitable. The reason that she, Hildegarde, felt like this was that she was n't accustomed yet to being alone, and it was so hard to reach the barrier yonder. Jack Galbraith. Would he, too, join them—the sensible stay-at-home folk? Curiously, Jack was grown as dim as last year's dreams. For weeks she had felt him fading out of the old picture. And in the new he had no place at all. Why was that? Perhaps he was dead. It seemed hardly to matter. Should she ever get to the barrier?

Oh, how they pushed and crowded upon her. It made her feel quite angry. Not so much with these poor

struggling people. But with Cheviot. If he were here now, instead of driving about with Bella, if those broad shoulders of his were between Hildegarde and— "Oh, please, please, you 're crushing me."

"Then stand back," said a man angrily.

And he was n't even drunk.

Over an hour it had taken her to penetrate from the outer fringes of the crowd, by way of the baggage-room, to this gate in the barrier, chained and barred. On the other side of it, an irate dragon on guard, ready to breathe fire and brimstone at the mere notion of letting anybody by. When Hildegarde signed to him, he only roared out over the heads of the people, "Nine o'clock 's the time everybody was told to come on board. If you don't like waitin' outside till the proper time you can go home." Hildegarde tried to convey across the barrier that she was acting under instructions. "Keep back," roared the dragon, quite as if he feared the tall figure might contemplate vaulting over.

"It is a special arrangement," she said quite low, "made by the purser himself."

"Yes, yes, very likely."

"I assure you the purser—"

"God A'mighty, what purser?"

Still Hildegarde spoke as confidentially as possible. "The purser of this ship."

"What 's the name o' the purser who could do a thing like that?"

"Mr. Brown is his name."

"Brown ain't the name o' the purser o' this ship. Guess again!"

The crowd exulted. The dodge had failed.

"Is n't this the *Los Angeles?*"

"Yes, by—!" A gush of oaths before which the girl gasped as if a bowl of ice-cold water had been dashed in her face. "Oh-h!—if Louis heard that! Luckily he will never know. He 's out driving with Bella."

She took her courage in both hands. "I shall report you if you don't let me by. Your own agent introduced me to the *Los Angeles* purser, and called him Mr. Brown."

"Purser, purser"—more blasphemy—"I would n't let the *owner* of this ship on board before nine o'clock."

"Mr. Brown said—"

"Brown! Brown!" shouted the man, goaded to frenzy by this feminine obstinacy. "Look yere, if he was Black and the devil himself I would n't let ye in after the orders I 've had."

The crowd chuckled and swayed.

The tall girl craned her neck over the barrier in the uncertain light. She had caught sight of a lurking figure uncommonly like the fat purser's, seeming to seek shelter behind a bale of merchandise. "Why, there he is now," she said quite low. "Mr. Brown!" No answer, and the figure vanished. "Mr. Brown!" she called, in a clear, penetrating voice. "I 'm here, as you told me to be. Mr. B—"

Hurriedly the tun-bellied figure reappeared and whispered to the dragon. A brief low-voiced altercation between the two men. Only one word distinguishable to the girl on the other side of the barrier, "noospaper." A growling menace of "trouble sure" from the dragon, and then the gate opened a cautious crack. The noospaper woman and her suit-case were plucked from the

murmuring crowd and set upon the ship. She turned to thank her rescuer. For all his amplitude he had melted into air. On the far side of the barrier, under the electric light, the crowd murmured and swayed, coupling the name of Brown with opprobrium.

The ship was badly lit and silent as the grave. Hildegarde felt her way down into the saloon, where a single light was burning. She found her cabin, and she put a jacket and a suit-case in her berth. On reflection, to make it look the more occupied, she added a green felt hat with her card stuck in the narrow band. Then out into the dim saloon. How strange for her to be in this place. So strange, she had a fleeting notion she would presently wake up and find herself in the little white room at home. But no, for the purser, who appeared and disappeared like some incorporeal essence, was standing at the door of the saloon with a pile of letters and telegrams, and little packets, saying: "There 's flowers, too, an' a box o' fruit an' a basket. When the steward comes, I 'll send them to your room."

Last letters from the few who had been allowed to know the name of her ship, from her mother and the boys, from Bella, from Eddie Cox—no one had forgotten her except— He might come yet. Even Bella's mother had sent a telegram, saying she hoped Hildegarde would find the traveling tea-basket a slight solace. Bella sent fruit, and wrote: "Come back as much the same Hildegarde as you can. You won't be quite the same I know. No one is after a great journey. Too much happens. No, I shan't ever see you again, dearest of all my friends, but let the Hildegarde that you bring home be as much like the old Hildegarde as you can manage."

These letters, the last echo of the old voices. Why did she hear plainest of all the one who was silent.

What was this! Homesick already, and the anchor not yet weighed?

She would go on deck. At the foot of the companionway she took heart of grace, breathing in gratefully the whiff of fresh air that came down to greet her. But halfway up she paused. What was that—that sound like the deep groundswell of the sea? Why, that must be the crowd—those people on the other side of the barrier and the ever-augmenting legions all along the water front. It was the sharp-featured youth, with the shifty little eyes, who had called her wish to check her baggage "a brilliant idear"; it was the drunken man who had shaken his little tired child; the woman with the white, white face; that other woman with the ear-rings, who hated anybody who went in front of her—all the people who had jostled and elbowed and tried to force her back. Soon they would be here, her daily companions. No escape. They were to become as familiar as people she had known all her life, as those home people who already seemed as far off as the dead folk are. But the home people were n't dead; they were driving and dancing, and they had nothing more in common with Hildegarde Mar. She was henceforth to be companioned by that hungry crowd out there, with its vague murmuring, like the sea at Monterey. Dancing and merrymaking fell back into that far-off world that she had left so long ago, before she came all by herself to Seattle, all by herself was setting sail for Nome. Even when she reached the top of the companionway the noises on the wharf still sounded muffled for the most part and seemed to come

from afar. But every now and then a single anger-sharpened note—or a cheer it might be—went up into the still air as startling as a rocket, and like a rocket seemed to burst in that higher region and come falling down to earth in a shower of sharp broken cries and strange, unnerving noises. She remembered the man who had set the child on his shoulder, and a woman with gray hair. She seemed to see them trampled under foot. The woman in the sealskin jacket looked on. Something menacing even in the muted cries, as though they presaged some mighty uprising of a trampled people. Had there been sounds like these abroad in Paris streets in the days of the Revolution? The solitary girl lent herself for a moment to that terror of the mob which dimly feels that no physical danger on the earth can match the peril you may stand in before the fury of the mass. Any single creature, however angry or debased, is a human being. But the mass!—the mass is a monster, and the monster was at the gate.

Along the deserted deck she went, making hardly any noise, and listening with tense nerves.

How strange for her to be in this place alone.

Oh, Louis! Louis! and suddenly she had stopped. She was leaning her head against a stanchion, and the tears were running down her face.

But very soon she was ashamed.

Drying her eyes, she went aft on the upper deck. The air was soft and wooing. All the harbor full of shipping; and lights—lights everywhere. The arch of heaven was very wide and filled with an infinite dusk. It was like some soothing and benignant presence. She faced about, still looking up, and saw the keen little crescent

of the young moon hanging aslant, seeming to bend down over the *Los Angeles*. The sight of the little moon comforted the girl curiously. It seemed to be shining so hopefully, so gallantly, setting its tiny horns for a signal just over Hildegarde's ship. She turned a silver coin in her pocket while she wished, and in the dusk she curtsied to her Moonship. Feeling a little less forlorn after performance of these rites, she walked the silent deck with firmer step and the hornèd moon for company, trying not to listen to those sounds down there upon the wharf—trying to recapture her early zest in this enterprise. Now there were dim figures moving about the shadowy deck, and in the smoking-room a light was turned on. Through the window she could see a group of four men. They stood before a big sheet of paper laid upon the table, and they argued some point with anger. Why, one of the men was the little agent! "I swear it 's all right"—he raised his voice excitedly—"all quite regillar an' legal."

A snigger near where the girl stood made her aware of the presence of two men behind her there in the dusk, one indifferent, half turned away; the other, through spectacles that caught the smoking-room light, looked in over Hildegarde's shoulder at the angry group.

"What are they arguing so about?" asked the girl, a little anxiously. If either of the men outside answered she did n't hear, for the noise below on the wharf had been growing louder. Surely there was a riot going on! "Oh, what is it?" she asked. "What 's the matter down there?"

"The matter is it 's close on ten o'clock," said the man with the spectacles.

"But they promised to let the people in at nine!"

"That 's the trouble."

"Why did n't they?"

"That 's why." The spectacled face nodded toward the smoking-room window. The voices in there were held down now, but three of the faces were angrier than ever. The fourth was sullen and set.

"Won't you tell me what is happening?"

"Only a little false swearing."

"What about?"

"The size of the passenger list. The *Los Angeles* is chartered to carry three hundred. They 've sold over five hundred first-class tickets."

"Is that the inspector in there?"

The spectacles moved up and down, making "Yes" with flashes of light, and the lowered voice said: "He 's refused to sign our clearance papers."

"Then we won't get off?"

"Oh, probably." The reply rang so cynical, as the spectacled stranger walked after his silent companion, that Hildegarde stared the more earnestly through the window at the drama going on within.

Did they "square" the inspector? She only knew the party broke up and melted away, and a few minutes after, a change came over the crowd below. A sudden animation that exploded in yells. Was it triumph? Or was it rage? Or was it pain? Yes, surely some one was crying "Help," and a woman shrieked, and now a sound like a flood breaking all barriers and deluging the world. The lights went up on a sudden all over the ship, and down below the gates gave way. In an incredibly short time the ship that had seemed so lonely—it was full.

And the torrent of humanity that swept in looked so wild-eyed and disheveled, angry, and possessed by evil passion, that Hildegarde turned and fled down the companionway, and hid herself in her cabin. Ah, yes, she was n't much of a heroine. It had been the work of a few seconds to turn the dim and silent ship into a howling, flaring pandemonium, hundreds of angry voices clamoring, complaining, threatening, shouting questions, muttering hoarse abuse. "The company"—everybody was blaming the company. Dozens of people tried to force their way into the cabin for five, at the foot of whose authorized list of occupants stood the name of "Miss H. Mar," and in one of whose berths that intrepid adventurer was sitting in the midst of her possessions, cross-legged like a Turk, staring, listening, wondering what was going to happen when Governor David M. Jones appeared. Was this he? No, only a huge young woman, in a man's hat and ulster, who growled and muttered unintelligibly—a foreigner, who seemed to be cursing in Dutch. But this other, breathing American fire and biblical brimstone, this must be Mrs. Governor Jones, holding up her skirt, half torn out of its gathers. Would she wreak vengeance for that as well as for graver misfortunes on the Turk in the upper berth? As the night wore on the people sorted themselves. Hildegarde came to distinguish between the interlopers and the women who belonged in here; battered and breathless and worn out, but held together by a common bond of fearsome experience in getting on board, and agreed, besides, in regarding none too benevolently the person who sat up there in the farther top berth, staring with wide eyes at the stories of what the others had suffered,

and herself saying never a word, till some one came to the door to ask if Miss Mar was "there all right." "*I* don't know," said the nearest woman crossly.

"Oh, yes, yes," said the Turk, tumbling out of the top berth. "Is that you, Louis?" Now she knew how sure she had been, and how hugely glad of his coming. But there at the door only the fat purser, who seemed to have gone mad. He stared vacantly at the young lady, pulled off his cap, and polishing his shining crown with a large handkerchief, muttered abstractedly: "Oh—a—*that 's* all hunky-dory!" and hurried away. As soon as she recovered her breath, Hildegarde caught up her hat and went after him to explain and to inquire.

But he was swallowed in the crowd. She made a tour of the deck. But no, one could n't stay long, and anyhow Cheviot was n't there. Not even the Blumpittys seemed to be there. Curlyhead was refusing to come and be put to bed, refusing in terms incredibly sulphurous for one of such tender years. It turned you sick to hear such language from baby lips.

"Where you off to?" said one man to another just in front of Hildegarde.

"Goin' to report to the authorities."

"Report what?"

"The rat hole they 're askin' me to sleep in."

"Plenty o' time. We ain't goin' to get off till tomorrer, anyway."

"*What!* Why, we 're a week late a'ready."

"Some of us 'll be later 'n that. The authorities are goin' to hold back a couple of hundred fur the next ship."

"Who says so? *I* ain't goin' to wait."

"Well"—he lowered his voice—"there 's inconvenient questions about over-crowdin'."

The raging malcontent of the moment before was straightway tamed. You saw in his face that he would do his share in hushing up the conditions under which he was to make the voyage.

As Hildegarde sped along the last stretch of the deck before going below, her astonished eyes fell upon the giant. Then he had n't got off by the *Congress!* She was about to ask him if he 'd seen the Blumpittys, but some one else was surprised to find the giant on board the *Los Angeles*—a puffing, excited individual, with a red beard, in the act of pushing past, stopped, stared, and then clapped the giant on the back. "Gawd A'-mighty! Is that you!"

"No," says the giant calmly. "I 'm Ford O'Gorman."

Again Hildegarde hurried down the companionway, and very much as an agitated tabby seeks refuge in the attic, she clambered into the top berth furthest from the door.

And Cheviot had never come!

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN she waked the next morning it was to a sensation of strange silence and gentle motion. Why, they had got off, then, after all! She was on her way to Nome.

She sat up and looked about at the wreck of wardrobe and the prostrate bodies of women. One made a noise like a half-suppressed moan. After a moment the owner of the little sound of misery got up and tried to put on a pink flannel jacket. For some reason that simple operation appeared to be painful. She was about to abandon it. Hildegarde, half-way down from her berth, said, "I 'll help you." But the other shrank away. "No, no." She leaned her forehead against the upper berth.

"You are n't sick already, are you?"

"No, it 's only—they nearly broke my arm in the crush last night."

"Oh-h!"

"I think it 's just strained, that 's all."

As she turned round to sit on the edge of her berth, there, hanging outside the nightgown's split sleeve, was the injured arm, bare to the shoulder, swollen, discolored.

"Oh! What have you been doing for it?"

"I was thinking of going out to get some cold water."

"Is the water here hot?" Hildegarde asked, bewildered.

The woman did n't trouble to answer.

Hildegarde was investigating. "Why, there 's no water at all!"

"No."

After more looking about, "Have you discovered where the bell is?"

The woman lifted sleepless eyes and gave her an odd look. "I don't expect bells on this ship."

"Oh, I did n't know." Hildegarde put on her dressing-gown, took the tin ewer and sallied forth. After a variety of adventures she came back. The woman lifted her face out of the pillow when she heard the sound of water splashing into the tin basin. "Oh, they got it for *you.*"

"No, I got it for myself. Come and hold your arm over, won't you? I 'll bathe it."

A little surprised—a little doubtful, the woman got up, saying, "Thank you." What a nice voice said it! But this fine-skinned, delicate-faced traveler was disposed to be reserved. Hildegarde could feel that for some reason she was suspicious of such ready friendliness.

"It 's most dreadfully bruised. How did you do it?"

"I did n't do it."

"Who?"

"Oh, a man."

"How in the world—?"

"Against the barrier. He was trying to get in front of me. I told him he was breaking my arm, but he—" She left the sentence unfinished.

Hildegarde's eyes followed the last trickle of cool water over the vivid purple and yellow and green of the swollen bruise. No doubt the hurt showed the ghastlier for the natural whiteness of the skin. "Well, whoever did it would be sorry, I think, if he saw your arm this morning."

"Sorry?" She moistened the end of a towel and Hildegarde helped her to arrange a loose compress.

"Yes; sorry and ashamed."

"You don't know them as I do."

"Know who?"

"Men." Then, as Hildegarde made no instant rejoinder, "*I* was alone," the woman added, so pointedly that Hildegarde hastened to say, "I 'm alone, too."

But the other seemed not to believe this, or, at least, to take no account of it. "Last night was n't my first battle," she said; "I 've been in the wars all my life," and with a weary superiority she went back to her berth.

Ah, she was one of those women with a standing grievance! Hildegarde felt for her the cheerful forbearance of the person who unconsciously takes his own immunity from rancor as a tribute to his nice disposition or his balanced judgment.

Up on deck a flood of sunshine, a dazzling sea, a green shore not yet very far away, a distant background of snowcapped mountains.

On board the *Los Angeles* few people yet afoot. There was Curlyhead dashing about, responding to Hildegarde's good-morning with a cheerful oath. She took hold of him. "Listen to me," she said, "you are not to say such horrible things."

"Shut up!" and more of the same sort. She dropped

the child with precipitation and walked to the ship's side. Those two men just there by the life-boat, had they heard the dreadful words? She was hot at the thought. They seemed to be talking about the boy now, that spectacled man and his friend. The friend must have a cold or something wrong with him, for even on this glorious morning he kept his arctic cap pulled down over his neck, and his overcoat "storm collar" turned up above his ears. Instead of taking a constitutional before breakfast, there he was lounging behind the life-boat. The spectacled man got tired of so sluggish a companion. He left the muffled-up figure and began to tramp about by himself. Hildegarde passed him with "good-morning." There was her steamer-chair in the corner. She ought to get it out and place it before the deck overflowed.

The spectacled man lent a hand.

"Well, we did get off," he said.

"Yes. When was it?"

"About half past four, they say."

"Then this is Puget Sound?"

"Yes. Those are the Cascade Mountains on that side. The Olympics on the other."

Just then the giant came swinging down the breezy deck.

"Oh, do you know," Hildegarde asked him, "if Mr. and Mrs. Blumpitty got on board all right?"

"Well," said the smiling Hercules, "they got on board." He waited a moment. When the spectacled gentleman had taken himself off. "Got your seat?" he asked.

"Won't this be a good place?"

"I mean for meals."

"Must I see about that?"

"If you don't want to eat scraps at the second table or the third."

"My ticket is first-class."

"That 's got nothing to do with it. Shall I go and see they keep you a place?"

"Oh, will you?"

When she went down to breakfast she was bidden to a vacant seat on the giant's left. The other belonged to one of the two ex-governors on board. But this particular excellency was not up yet. Beyond the place reserved was a lean lathe of a man, with a voracious appetite. Opposite, sat a big, shy individual, to whom people spoke deferentially as "Senator Cochrane." Next him a slim, attractive-looking woman, with fair hair, too young, you would have said, to be the mother of the girl beside her; but this pretty little person in her teens was Mrs. L'Estrange's daughter, so said the giant. What on earth could be taking people like that? The giant did n't know. Neither did the person next him, a gentleman with a white "goatee," who told the company that, as for himself, though, like everybody else, he expected to get a claim, he was taking sixty dozen chickens to Nome, and was "dead sure to make a good thing of it." He longed to talk more about chickens, and was obviously disturbed by his stout friend further down, who would keep shouting remarks to the chicken-merchant about thirty-eight horses he had on board, and whose conveyance to Nome was costing the fat gentleman $100 apiece; and he did n't grudge it. Indeed, the horses' quarters were so superior to the fat gentleman's own, that he 'd "been thinkin'." There wus one o'

them horses—a daisy lot they were—but there wus one of 'em he 'd taken a dislike to. Did n't know why, quite groundless—but the fat man was like that. His wife said he was notional. Perhaps she was right. He never contradicted a lady. But, anyways, he was goin' to give up his own first-class accommodation. In future he would bunk with the horses. And the one he had a "pick on," the mare with one white stocking and a star on her forehead, she should have berth 147. If you had a quite groundless but deadly spite against any one, that was a sure way to fix her, just put her in berth 147. "Anyways—ladies first," he wound up, handing to the pretty mother of the young girl a vast dish, in which slabs of fat bacon floated in an inch of grease.

Not only the horse-dealer and the giant were attentive to the supposed wants of the three women who appeared at breakfast. Two of the roughest-looking of the men had stood aside on Hildegarde's entrance to let her go first, and there were those who warmly recommended the cold bully-beef, and yet others who urged upon her the excellence of the hot buckwheats. Could these be the wild animals who had roared and ravened outside the night before?

At Hildegarde's end of the table sat a group of three who seemed to have interests in common. "Mining men," the giant said. They talked of the difficulty in getting all their machinery on board. They and the giant had stayed up till the *Los Angeles* left the port of Seattle, mounting guard over their "stuff." They aired their views about the ship. Plenty of white paint on her (or had been before so much of it came off on the passengers)—but the *Los Angeles* was a whited sepulchre.

"Has n't she just been an army transport?" ventured Hildegarde, with the average American's unquestioning respect for anything indorsed by the Government.

"Oh, yes, pressed into the service during the Spanish-American war. But the *Los Angeles* is nothing more nor less than an antiquated Cunarder from 'way back,' known to our grandfathers in the sixties as the rolling *Roumelia*. She got such a bad name even in those days of primitive ocean travel, that she had to clear out of the Atlantic. They rechristened her, brought her round the Horn and turned her on to the Japan trade. Except for taking those Johnnies to Manila, she had n't carried passengers for thirty years until this company got hold of her, crowded in ten berths where there 'd been two before, or none at all, and lied about the number of people they 'd sold tickets to."

In the act of shoveling in Boston beans with his knife, the lean individual next Hildegarde paused to remark: "If a man had committed the worst crime in the calendar, it 'd be a brutal punishment to make him sleep in the suffocatin' black hole they 've put me in."

"Exactly—" began one of the three financiers, assuming the lean one to be agreeing with him.

"But," interrupted the bean-feaster, "when they says t' me they wus n't no more room, I says, 'Lookee here, it 's worth anywheres from fifty to sixty thousand dollars to me to be among the first to git there. You can put me in *any*wheres,' I says. 'Y' can do anything in hell,' I says, 'except leave me behind.' An' b' gosh they done it." He champed his beans with a look that betokened renewed relish at having given the conversation an unexpected turn. Accomplished as this person was, he, with

a plate full of Boston beans and a knife, could do nothing as original with his food as the passenger on the other side of the table next to the pretty girl. After one fascinated stare in his direction, Hildegarde felt it wiser to look away. It was not, however, that moment's astonishing vision that prevented her from eating her own breakfast. The giant was charitably concerned. Try this, and that. But Hildegarde disposed of a little of the sticky gray porridge and condensed milk, a sip of the muddy coffee, and then she played with the sour bread while she listened to the conversation. Suddenly, whirling round her pivoted chair, she returned with ardor to the sunshine-flooded upper regions.

It looked as though every soul who was n't at the first breakfast must be on deck. In this clear and searching light Miss Mar's traveling companions stood revealed—a strange, an unexampled crew. Scraps of German, of Swedish, of French, and of tongues to which she had no key, floated past her ear. In this new world of the *Los Angeles,* no color line discoverable, no alien labor law in force. Her eye fell upon the cryptic faces of the Japanese, and on familiar types of negro and mulatto, cheek by jowl with lawyers, clergymen, and senators. There were raw, red Irishmen, and overdone brown Hebrews. The captain went by talking broad Scotch to the English doctor, and the pig-tailed crew pulled at the cordage in unison to an uncouth Chinese chant.

And never was such sunshine, never shores so green, never before mountain ranges so ethereal, so softly touched with snow or wreathed in cloud.

But the people—the people!

The girl wandered about, all eyes, or sat in her long

chair, for which there was hardly room now on the swarming deck. She held in one hand a little volume in which never a page was turned, for here, moving up and down before her, was matter more wonderful than any history written in any book. The thought she found coming up oftenest: What on earth takes him—or her—to Nome? For Louis, it seems, was in one thing right. Here was no Klondike company of sturdy pioneers, all men of brawn, or Amazonian women. Some such were in the throng, but the majority, weedy clerks and dyspeptic nondescripts. There went a man with only one arm to dig his gold. Several smartly dressed ladies flashed by with an air of being on their way to a garden party. Here was a hollow-chested youth with a corpse-like face, crawling painfully about with the aid of a cane. There were other children besides Curlyhead, and a number of quite old men—one grizzled creature with both feet "club." What are *they* going to do in such a place as Nome? Hildegarde seemed to be the only one to wonder. Every face shining, every heart seemed lifted up. One and all were well-assured they had only to see Nome to "obtain joy and gladness." "Nome is the place," their faces said, "where sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Here were the Blumpittys, looking a good deal battered, but he, at least, no gloomier than common, and she beaming like all the rest. Hildegarde got up to greet them. "I looked for you at breakfast."

"We are having ours later," quoth Mrs. Blumpitty, as one admitting habits luxurious. But since the second table had been summoned some time before it was patent that to be of the Blumpitty party meant you must eat at the third.

"Are you comfortable where you are?" inquired the rusty one solicitously.

"Oh, yes, quite, thank you," said Hildegarde, a little ashamed at being so infinitely better off than poor Mrs. Blumpitty. But that lady, with an air of subdued pride, was presenting, "One of our party, Dr. Daly," an important-looking man of thirty or so, with a highly impressive manner. "Ruth, Ruth, please come here! My niece, Miss Sears." "My niece" was little and shy and brown. Hildegarde felt instantly that she was a nice niece. "And this is Mr. Tobin. Dr. Merton"—about nineteen this last gentleman, with the complexion of a lucky girl. "And Dr. Thomas." Why, it rained doctors! Which was the dentist? Hildegarde on reflection decided they were all dentists. "Oh, and here comes Miss Leroy Schermerhorn!" Mrs. Blumpitty spoke in the tone of a chamberlain announcing "Her Majesty the Queen!" Through the crowd advanced the heralded "business woman to Blumpitty & Co.," a lady of twenty-eight or thirty, with a somewhat defiant face under the shadow of a fuzzy black bang, and a ruthless eye. When it had pierced Miss Mar in many a vital spot, it fell upon the only deck-chair on the ship, with its "robe" and scarlet cushion. "Well, you 're making yourself pretty comfortable," said Miss Leroy Schermerhorn. "Like your room?"

Hildegarde was in no haste to reply.

Mrs. Blumpitty bridged the chasm. "I was so glad when I heard you 'd got a berth up-stairs."

"I guess it cost you a lot," said Miss Schermerhorn, with a snap of her eyes.

"No," said Hildegarde. "It was a piece of luck."

"Well, I 'm that glad and relieved," said Mrs. Blum-

pitty, as the haughty Schermerhorn retired a few paces to whisper conclusions in Dr. Thomas' ear, while surreptitiously both pursued their study of Miss Mar. But Mrs. Blumpitty's eye still angled among the sea creatures that swarmed upon the waters of Puget Sound. With a little jerk of satisfaction she landed yet another big fish.

"Miss Estelle Maris."

Oh, yes, the lady with the languid air, the rakish hat and red velveteen blouse; this was the one who "said" she could cook.

"Any more of our party up yet?" Mrs. Blumpitty asked her.

"Guess the rest 's asleep," answered Miss Estelle Maris.

"Guess so, too," said Mr. Blumpitty, with benevolence. "We wus all pretty tired." And that was the sole reference to the battle of the night before. Neither then nor later from any member of Blumpitty's staunch party a syllable of complaint at their quarters on the ship.

Mr. Blumpitty himself, during these amenities and some further conversation, had stood by the ship's side, looking sadly toward Vancouver Island.

"There goes our breakfast horn," said his wife at last, as one who offers substantial cheer.

The Blumpitty party melted away; only the leader remained. "Guess everybody that ain't on deck 's either eatin' or asleep." He offered it as a general comment upon existence.

"I suppose so," said Miss Mar.

"And the smokin'-room 'll be empty. Will you step in there a minute?"

"Yes." (What on earth—?)

"Little matter o' business," he said, leading the way.

Two men in one corner puffed bad cigars while they bent over a glazed paper, whereon a certain property was outlined in red ink. No one else there. Hildegarde and Mr. Blumpitty took the opposite corner.

"I got t' give y' $25," said Blumpitty, as one who has studied every alternative.

"What in the world for?" asked the young lady.

"Bonus on the *Congress* ticket." He had pulled a roll of bills out of his pocket, and the breeze in the transit from open porthole to open door paused on its way to toy with greenbacks of a goodly denomination.

"I did n't know there was a bonus," said Hildegarde.

"Naw," said Blumpitty vaguely, as he handed her the money. He got up murmuring "breakfast." But when he found himself on his feet he glanced with slow caution at the absorbed faces opposite, still bent over the map of a mining district, and lowering his voice, "Did Mrs. Mar say anything to you touchin' the Mother Lode?"

"Yes."

"Well, don't mention it, will yer?"

As Hildegarde looked up to say, "Oh, no, indeed," there was the spectacled man's friend at the porthole. At least it looked like his cap and his high collar, for that was all of him that any one could see. Even that much vanished the moment Hildegarde raised her eyes. When she and Mr. Blumpitty reached the deck the arctic cap was nowhere to be seen. How had he disappeared so quickly in such a crowd?

Mr. Blumpitty paused a moment before going below, muttering to himself, "I jest been talkin' to a gentle-

man''—the yellow-gray eyes went over the heads of the throng—''a gentleman that thinks *he* knows where it is.''

''The Mother Lode?''

Blumpitty's pale visage relaxed to something remotely like a smile as he answered, ''But he don't.''

''I suppose,'' said Hildegarde, ''all these people in one way or another hope to find it—the Mother Lode, you know.''

Blumpitty's vague eyes came back from the snow-capped range of the Cascades, and dwelt with a ruminant sympathy upon the passing faces. ''Ya-as, they think they 're headin' straight fur it. But they ain't.''

''Nobody on all this ship, or on all the other ships is really heading straight but you.''

''Wa-al''—he seemed to wish to be strictly, punctiliously accurate—''I got to go to Snow Gulch first.''

''But after that?''

''Ya-as. After that!'' And Blumpitty went to the third breakfast-table on his way to millionairedom and the Mother Lode.

The girl lay back in her long chair and stared at the crowd, thinking how strange it was that Hildegarde Mar should be among them, and even while she wondered the sense of strangeness was wearing away.

And these purblind, trustful creatures, filled with their pathetic hopes, was it of them she had been afraid? She smiled at the absurdity. They were rough and crude, but not in the least alarming—except at a distance. She pondered this, catching glimpses of a truth of wider application. When the motley throng had stood without the gate struggling and crying to be allowed on

board this enchanted ship, when Hildegarde had stood apart from them, not enlightened by sharing in their lot, she had had her moments of misgiving, or rather she had been seized by a quite childish panic.

And, after all, what harm can they do me? Poor little Curlyhead, they might teach him a few more bad words (though even that was open to doubt)—one or two ignorant girls in their teens, they might suffer. But Hildegarde Mar—how could they hurt a person twenty-six years old, who is among them for a few days out of a lifetime. What 's the good of me and my better advantages if I can be injured by this sort of thing?

It was something to get back her courage to be alone among these people. Last night she had been under an illusion about them. Yes, she had had some bad moments, but they had come chiefly because she had so set her heart on seeing—yet no, let her be honest. Louis's neglect had put her out of tune, disheartened her quite unaccountably, but the worser moments had come through positive fear. And the fear had come—oh, it was clear now—it had come through having her mind filled with foreboding by the people who cared most for her. There was always that potency in evil prophecy—it went a long way toward bringing about its own fulfilment. If good were foretold you were afraid to believe it. If evil you were afraid not to believe.

There was that much truth in the fabled power of the Evil Eye. Her expedition had been so frowned on, eyed so askance; small wonder she had failed to keep her courage quite untarnished. Well, she had found out one thing on the threshold of the journey. It is the fear felt for us by the men who love us that makes cowards of

womankind; it is others' shrinking that goes far to make us quail.

She took a sheet of folded note-paper out of her little Tennyson and her pencil traced the words: "On board the *Los Angeles,* May 31, 1900. My dear Louis—" Yes, she would write him a long, long letter, and tell him how little ground there was for fear. But she would write very gently, even humbly, and get him to understand and to forgive her. She would show him how much better his fellow-men were than he had given out.

She remembered with an instant's loss of enthusiasm her room-mate's account of the matter. But she decided that lady was of a carping and a gloomy nature—she looked on the dark side. Perhaps Hildegarde would feel less cheerful herself if she 'd had her arm nearly broken—but an accident could happen anywhere.

"And the stoop-shouldered man is the father." It was Mrs. Locke, Hildegarde's room-mate, who said the words, her eyes on Curlyhead. That person, in a towering rage, stood in a group of laughing men. They were plaguing him just to hear him swear. Mrs. Locke was still very white, her arm in a sling. But what a nice face she had!

"*Do* sit here," Hildegarde urged, and finally prevailed. The new-comer said very little. Others stopped in passing and talked to Hildegarde. Mrs. Locke sat and looked at the sea. Before one o'clock a stiff breeze sprang up. It cleared the deck as if the people had been so many mosquitoes, for the *Los Angeles* began to roll. "I am a fair sailor," said Mrs. Locke. "I shan't mind."

"Oh, this is where you are!" some one was saying familiarly just behind them, Hildegarde thought to Mrs.

Locke. But on looking round she met the purser's fascinating smile. Mrs. Locke got up instantly, murmuring something about feeling the need of a walk. The purser dropped comfortably into the vacant chair.

"Well, my dear, and how do you find yourself this morning?" As Miss Mar did not instantly respond, "Goin' to be a good sailor?" he said, with a great display of teeth.

Hildegarde looked at him and decided he was a little idiotic, but that she must have dreamed the "dear." She answered him upon that supposition. Still he talked rather queerly, she thought, till the first horn sounded for dinner.

"I 've got a place for you at my table," he said, getting up.

"Oh, thank you, but I have a seat already."

"That don't matter, it won't go beggin'. I 'm lookin' out for you all right," he assured her, as though he had heard himself accused of neglect. "I was up till five this mornin', so I slept late, or I 'd been around before."

"It is very good of you, but I 've got quite a good place. I won't change, thank you."

"Oh, come now, don't be huffy. How could I tell you 'd be up at breakfast? Come along, my dear."

Hildegarde stared at him, and then she said quite gently: "I 'm not the least huffy, but I 'll keep the seat I have, thank you."

"Oh, very well! *Very well!*" and he took himself off in a state that might, perhaps, be described in his own words as "huffy"—oh, but very huffy indeed.

Before Vancouver's Island faded out of sight everybody was greatly intrigued to see the men of the British

post there signaling the passing ship. What were they doing that for? People ran about the decks asking one another, "What 's happened?" It was an exciting moment, for this communication, whatever it was, would be the last the *Los Angeles'* passengers would know for many a day of the great world's happenings. A boom of cannon came across the water. The news filtered down from the bridge: "Lord Roberts has entered Pretoria!"

"And that 's the last human sign," said ex-Governor Reinhart, "till we sight the ships at Nome."

"Or, better still," amended one of the first table financiers, "the last till we signal to the Nomites: The fleet 's behind! We 've won the race. 'Rah! for the *Los Angeles!*" The betting had already begun. The run was to be anything from a week to a month.

Losing sight of land meant losing sunshine and calm seas, almost, it would appear, losing the vast majority of the passengers.

The next few days saw a surprisingly deserted deck. The *Los Angeles,* however antiquated, had lost none of her pristine capacity for rolling. At least ninety per cent. of the people were laid low. Most of the stewards (all green hands working their passage to Nome), instead of ministering to others on the way, were making the voyage on their backs.

Hildegarde, the only one of her cabin to leave it, dragged herself on deck early every morning to find fortitude by dint of staying out in the air. It was not solely the awful pitching of the ship, not even the added discomfort of the dank, cold weather, that made up the

sum of her discomfort. The purser had got on her nerves. Still she did n't like snubbing him any more than was strictly necessary—not from fear of reprisals (though, beyond a doubt, he was a power in this tiny kingdom), but because it was hideous to her even to see any one's self-respect hurt, let alone be the one to deal the wound. Nor could she help sympathizing with him. He must be under a ludicrous and rather pathetic illusion about himself to "go on" like this. Whenever he could be spared from his duties, there, wherever Miss Mar turned, was the fat purser, practising his most killing smiles, and proffering aid and companionship. In these gray and dripping days of nearly abandoned decks, her sole refuge was in the society of the giant, who discoursed pleasantly of sea-birds, and in any moment's lifting of the fog pointed out more whales. And he piloted Hildegarde's see-sawing steps fore and aft till she found her sea-legs. She was vaguely conscious that at a pinch she might count on the spectacled man.

Three days now since she had had a sign from the Blumpittys or any of their party except Dr. Daly. He had laughed and said: "They 're all very busy. Guess they don't want to be disturbed."

It was a relief when in the middle of a rainy afternoon Ruth Sears came to the surface. She was very wan and looked pathetic, childish, and attractive, too, in a skirt to her knees, stout boots and long gaiters. And she had come to ask Miss Mar for a little meat extract for Mrs. Blumpitty.

Hildegarde had not waited for that moment to be glad she had disregarded the warm recommendation not to bother with ship supplies of her own, but to help herself

out of the Blumpittys' and pay at the end of the voyage.

Ruth said sadly: "There 's been some mistake. Our grocery box can't be found." Down the two girls and the giant went to the regions behind the dining-saloon to open the provision-box whose contents had been Miss Mar's daily solace. There, in the swaying dingy murk, where the figures of Chinamen flitted, they opened the padlocked box and drew forth jars of Liebig, crackers, cheese, and silver packets of tea.

"Oh, it *is* kind of you!" Ruth's gentle eyes were shining. "She has n't had anything for forty-eight hours, but she 'll be able to eat *now*."

Poor Mis' Bumble Bee!

"I 'll lend you my alcohol lamp," said Hildegarde. "I make tea every afternoon when it is n't too rough. Won't you come and have some?"

The wan little niece going off with her hands full, paused an instant. "If—if I 'm able, thank you."

"You ought to be more on deck. Of course you 're ill if you stay down there."

"I could n't take care of them if I did n't," and she was gone.

The next day the fat purser was so all-pervading that Hildegarde felt herself making up her mind that really something must be done. She had scant patience with girls who complained at this order of infliction. Her firm conviction, "It 's their own fault"; though just how the purser's foolishness was hers she could not determine.

The afternoon was wild and rough, the smoking-room, packed and noisy. The overflow of men, with a few very subdued-looking women, sat below in the "Ladies'

Saloon''—a feebly-lit, ill-smelling little room, where an aged upright piano kept company with a hurly-burly of freight and three rickety chairs. Hildegarde's fortitude threatened to give way after two minutes of the foul, close air. But up on deck the purser! and not a soul beside, except the bean-feaster, Mr. Isaiah Joslin, trudging up and down in oilskins, and the arctic cap driven off the bridge by the inclement weather. He sat in the most sheltered corner of the upper deck, obviously asleep, with arms folded and head withdrawn into his collar. The wind rose and the rain swept down upon the place where Hildegarde and the giant (with intervals of purser) had spent the morning. Oh, where was that giant now? She moved her chair to the better shelter near the arctic cap. At least, the purser did it for her, and was altogether so oppressive with his poor little gallantries and what the giant called his ''toothsome smile,'' that Hildegarde felt, whatever the penalty of his worst displeasure, in another moment she would be doing something more drastic than throwing out broad hints which he either disregarded or affected to consider humorous. She wished now that before moving she had said something even he could n't misunderstand. With another man by it would make the purser mad with fury. In any case, hardly fair to subject him publicly to a snubbing as effectual as she saw was going to be necessary. The arctic cap, for all the seeming blindness and deafness of his hidden face, might be listening. So Miss Mar merely drew her tartan plaid up about her shoulders and observed with some gravity that she was going to sleep. The purser took up a romantic attitude at her feet, saying, ''Good-night.'' Hil-

degarde jumped up. "I 'll go and see how Mrs. Blumpitty is."

Getting rid of the purser lent a rapture even to going below. And as she went she smiled, remembering how her mother was comforting herself with the thought of the Blumpittys ("splendid sailors" both of them!) pledged to watch over Miss Mar, and if she were laid low to bring her sustenance on deck out of their private supplies. Four days and no glimpse of either of her guardian angels till this moment, when, rolling through the second saloon on her way to smooth Mrs. Blumpitty's pillow, Hildegarde, pitching from side to side, clutching at anything within reach to steady herself, caught sight of her stand-by, her protector, the man who was going to minister to her and "see her through," Blumpitty, with ghastly visage, clinging to the knob of a cabin door like a shipwrecked mariner to a spar. In these days of seclusion poor Mr. Blumpitty had sadly altered, wearing now a yellow-gray beard of some five days' growth, bristling upon a countenance pea-green and pitiful.

"Oh, is that you?" says the young lady, holding on to the rough board that covered with newspapers at meal time, did duty down here for a dining-table. "How do you do?"

"How—" Blumpitty stopped at that and devoted his entire attention to keeping hold of the knob.

Hildegarde did n't quite like to go away and leave him to his fate, at a moment so abject in the Blumpitty history, nor did she quite know how to conduct a conversation under these conditions. She decided frankness was best. So, as her friend still clutched and tried

to steady himself, she gave way a little to smiling. "I thought you were a seasoned old salt, Mr. Blumpitty."

He only rolled his yellow eyes—but no, that statement is misleading, for Blumpitty rolled his entire economy. Yet never a word rolled out. Hildegarde, wishing to spare his feelings, added, as she turned to go, "A great many people seem to have been bowled over by the pitching of *this* ship."

"No ship," said Blumpitty in a sepulchral whisper, "no *ship* could make a man feel like this."

Hildegarde was alarmed. Was Mr. Blumpitty about to be snatched from them by some fell disease?

"Wh-what do you think it is?" she inquired, with another lurch, but much sympathy.

He clung now with both hands to his savior-knob, while the rolling *Roumelia* worked her own wild will upon Mr. Blumpitty's contorted frame. "It 's the cook," he groaned.

"The *cook!*" This was indeed terrible! His brain was giving way!

"Yes," he went on hoarsely in an interval of comparative steadiness, "I know these fellows. If a sea-cook thinks he 's got too many people to feed—he—oh, Gawd!—he puts stuff in the coffee, or soap in the bread —and—people don't want to eat any more."

Roumelia resented this aspersion upon her son. She shot Mr. Blumpitty forward with extreme violence, and he, entirely without volition, found himself going on deck. But perhaps the same force that took him up brought him down and put him to bed, for Hildegarde saw him no more.

Over her further descent into that part of the ship she

had been intended to occupy, it is considerate to draw a veil.

She reappeared like a mourner at a funeral, following at Ruth's side in the wake of a figure borne on a mattress between a steward and the giant. The prostrate form of poor Mis' Bumble Bee, speechless, blind, deaf, was laid in the one sheltered corner of the deck. Ruth, very weak and unsteady, went back to that fetid under-world that beggared description, ministering to miserable men and women lying helpless on shelves, tier above tier to the ceiling. Even to be down there for five minutes was a thing to be remembered shuddering as long as one lived.

After putting her cushion under Mrs. Blumpitty's head, Hildegarde glanced round.

"Lookin' fur the purser?" said Mr. Isaiah Joslin, grinning and holding on to a stanchion.

"No," said Hildegarde, with some dignity.

Mr. Joslin accepted a graver view of life's possibilities. "That feller 'll get a thrashin' if he don't look out."

"The purser?"

"Yep."

"Why—who will—?"

"That man up there 'll be attendin' to it." Mr. Joslin nodded toward the bridge. The Arctic Cap was scanning the misty world through Captain Gillies' glass.

"Why should he? Besides, I thought he was an invalid."

"Wa-al, maybe that 's it. P'raps he thinks it 'd be good fur his health."

"What would?"

"W'y wallopin' the purser."

"What 's *he* got against the purser?"

"*Says* he don't like the color of his hair. But as the purser ain't got no hair, it 's my private opinion the gentleman up there don't like his fascinatin' ways." He looked significantly at the tall girl. Hildegarde bent down to tuck the tartan round Mrs. Blumpitty. Now, why on earth should the Arctic Cap care how the purser behaved to—other people?

CHAPTER XVIII

HEN Mrs. Blumpitty found herself being taken below that first evening, she revived sufficiently to protest, and so frustrated the giant's amiable design of carrying her off to bed. The invalid stayed on deck day and night, and instead of dying as the captain and all the passengers confidently expected, she got well and "lived happy ever after" on that voyage upon Miss Mar's supplies, sharing even the fresh eggs which the giant, by some means, acquired daily from the Nome-bound hens. Hildegarde was sorry she lacked courage to share Mrs. Blumpitty's new quarters. But the "queerness" of sleeping out of your bed—in the public eye, too!—almost the immodesty of it (in the passenger mind), if unpalliated, as in Mrs. Blumpitty's case, by threatened dissolution—no, it was too daunting. Since Mrs. Locke could "stand it" in the cabin, Hildegarde must. Even Mrs. Locke's seamanship had gone down before the *Roumelia's* roll, but she was getting better. She made fitful appearances on deck. But there was something odd about her. You never knew whether it was sea-sickness or distrust of her kind that would carry her suddenly below when a fellow-passenger stopped to speak to her.

Fresh from a raid upon the provision-box, Hildegarde

coming on deck one evening, found Mrs. Locke in an hour of clearing weather between showers. There was even a strip of ruddy sunset to gladden the voyager's heart.

Hildegarde looked round for her chair.

"It rained two drops a little while ago," observed Mrs. Locke, "and the man you call the giant moved your things."

"Oh, did he?" Hildegarde stood at the ship's side, looking at the fading red.

By and by, "Sit on half my stool," suggested Mrs. Locke.

"Thank you," said Hildegarde, feeling that coming from such a source this invitation was immensely cordial. "It 's very kind of you."

"No, that is n't it."

"What do you mean?"

"You 're the sort of person everybody wants to do things for." She seemed to point it out as a fault on Miss Mar's part.

Hildegarde looked at her curiously. "I should have thought *you* were more that kind of person, except for—" The cameo-like face must have been beautiful before it grew so white and set. You felt that a touch of color even now, a little happiness, would make it irresistible.

"Except?" Mrs. Locke echoed.

"Well, you know you *do*— Shall I say it?"

"Yes."

"You do receive friendliness a good deal at the point of the sword."

"I 've learnt my lesson." As Hildegarde said noth-

ing, "Wait till *you* are—" But any inclination to be more explicit vanished.

Hildegarde thought she had intended to say, "Wait till you 're as old as I." "I have a feeling you know immensely more than I do," said the girl, "but I don't believe you 're much older."

"I 'm thirty-two."

"Well, I 'm twenty-six."

"You don't look that much."

"I suppose it 's having eyes so wide apart."

"No, I think it 's your childish chin and your air of believing everything. But, anyhow, my thirty-two counts double." Then, as if again to turn the conversation away from herself, "You 're an infant, but rather a wise infant, after all," she added, relenting a little. "Only what takes you to Nome?"

Hildegarde told her. "And what are you going for?"

"Money."

"Not beach gold," said the girl smiling.

"I 've been sent for. I shall be bookkeeper to one of the large companies."

"Oh-h." Hildegarde's big eyes were so obviously uncongratulatory that Mrs. Locke said firmly, "It 's work I 'm used to."

"But—up there, won't it be very rough and difficult for—for any one like you—all alone?"

"They pay three times what I 've been getting. I 'm very lucky to have the offer, at least as I count luck now. I used to think—to have ambitions."

"I don't wonder," said Hildegarde, betraying a flattering confidence in the other's powers.

"I know my measure now. I 'm a failure." And still

there was no weakness, no repining in her tone. Level and courageous, but without comfort, wholly without anticipation.

"What shall you do with the money you make?"

"Buy freedom." Was she thinking of divorce? Apparently not, for she went on, "No woman 's free who has n't enough to live on without asking anybody for it. So I 'm going to Nome to avoid slavery."

"Your husband does n't mind?"

"He 's dead." No trace of emotion in the low voice. But yielding to the invitation in the girl's eyes, she told in brief outline of a hard life. The last six years of it alone. "But as to that, I was alone before. Only people did n't know it, and so things were easier."

"How easier?"

"There are always people to help the women who don't need help"—and then something of the disillusion that followed upon her husband's death; of difficult bread-winning; of inforced close relations with men through her work, and what she thought of them. "Exceptions? Well, I suppose so. I 've once or twice thought the exception had come my way."

"And were you wrong—*always* wrong?"

"You see the kind of men a bookkeeper in a western town is thrown with—oh, you have to walk very warily, to hold yourself down, to seem to misunderstand—not to let your disgust cost you your bread and butter." Hildegarde looked at the pure outline of the profile again. It was all very well to talk of having learnt lessons and of being over thirty, thought the girl. Mrs. Locke's troubles are n't over yet.

But perhaps she would find something better than

money on this journey, a real friend, or even— Several of the passengers were disposed to be conspicuously civil. There was that lawyer with the clever face. He was walking the deck now in the giant's company, and every time he passed he looked at Mrs. Locke.

"I 'm sure that man wants to come and talk to you," said Hildegarde.

"If you get up, I shall go below."

"Why don't you like Mr. Meyer?"

"Why should I like Mr. Meyer?"

"Well, he likes you. Does n't that a little—just a little— No? Well, then, there 's another reason. He told me he thought you were so plucky that you ought to be helped." As even this generous sentiment seemed not to melt the lady, "You 'd better be nice to him," said Hildegarde lightly, smiling in her effort to make her companion a little cheerfuller. "He told me he could get you a Nome lot that you could sell by and by for $2000."

"Did he say what I was to pay for it?"

"You don't pay anything, that 's what 's so beautiful."

"Really! Why does n't he get it for himself?"

"He 'll have one, too. Everybody will who knows—as he does—which are the forfeited ones. The thing is, you must live on the lot. Then you acquire squatter's sovereignty, and you can sell it for $2000."

"I see; and how much am I to give Mr. Meyer?"

"Oh, you *are* suspicious! He takes a real interest. He wants to 'put you on to' some unrecorded mining property he knows about."

"Yes."

"Has he told you?"

"He did n't tell me why a busy man like Meyer should stop to think of me."

"Do you think men never help women?"

"Yes, when they see some advantage for themselves." And then dark histories. The general effect of her experience, the sum total of that knowledge she had brought out of commerce with men, and which was always ready to rise up and menace her—it seemed almost incredible to the sheltered woman. But it was not all narrow, personal repining. Mrs. Locke had theories. She had lived once in a state where women voted. She told stories of going to the polls. In spite of the opposition of male politicians she had once herself held office.

"Well, how did you like being a notary public?"

"I hated it, but it taught me things."

"Unless my life 's a failure," she said, with an unconscious loftiness, "I don't expect to have time to bother about politics."

"You 'd feel differently if you did n't belong to the privileged class."

"Oh, but I don't. I belong to quite plain people. And we 've been very poor."

"Have you ever worked for your living?"

"No."

"Exactly. Intelligent and able-bodied, and yet you 've—"

"I 've helped at home."

"You may have saved the wages of a housekeeper or a sewing woman, but you 've taken what was given you as a dole; and you have n't a notion what you 'd do if the men of your family died or cast you off. Or—*have* you?"

"I never thought about it."

"That 's what I mean. You belong to what they call the privileged class. The 'privilege' is to know as little of life as a pet canary."

Hildegarde only laughed.

"Oh, yes, you sing very sweetly, and the song says you 've got all the rights you want. All it means is that through some man living or dead the singer has what material comforts she needs. And the burden of the song is, 'Look how contented and feminine I am. *I 'm* all right. With the mass of womankind it 's different, but I shan't bother.' "

"You think it 's different with the mass?"

"You know it is. Never mind"—she made a little impatient move of the head as though to free her brain from some thorny contact—"I 've had my time of trying to help the rest. From this on I have just one object. I 've made up my mind to put up with any and everything till I 've bought my freedom. That 's why I 'm here."

"How long will it take you to buy freedom?" asked Hildegarde.

Mrs. Locke clasped one hand over the other on the railing of the ship and leaned her chin down on the whitened knuckles. She fixed her steady eyes upon the wave-fretted, glaucous-looking waste, less like water than like vast fields of molten lead, falling into furrows, forever shifting and forever shaped anew. "I say to myself that if I slave and rough it for five years more, I shall be able to buy a little home in the country and know some peace before I die."

It seemed a gray existence, and Hildegarde, with the hopeful self-sufficiency of happy youth, felt in her heart

that the woman must somehow be to blame. Men were not always or usually what Mrs. Locke gave out. Even in the crush at the wharf, though the rougher people had pushed and jostled and sworn, nobody had tried to break Hildegarde's arm. Mrs. Blumpitty had roughed it, but she did n't complain of men, though Blumpitty must be a trial. No, poor Mis' Bumble Bee, on her pallet of straw in the corner of the deck, was by the side of this other woman an enviable object even in the worst weather, and the statement may stand although it lack its true significance to that portion of mankind which happened not to be in the North Pacific or the Bering Sea in the first June of this century. Even when the weather was not doing anything spectacular, the dank chill was of the sort that searched the marrow. The fogs penetrated tweed and mackinaw and even leather, till people's apparel wilted, and conducing less to warmth than shivering, clung to their figures as clammily as a half-dried bathing dress. The rugs and "robes" and wraps weighed each a ton—the very bedclothes seemed never to be dry. Day and night the fog-horn hooted, or, when the all-enveloping grayness lifted for a little, it was only to loosen the great rains, as if most mighty Jupiter Pluvius, thinking to use the ship for his tub, had pulled the shower-bath string just above it, discharging a water-spout over the *Los Angeles.* And after that, sleet, mist drizzle, and fog again.

Every man on board began to suffer visibly and audibly from the national complaint. In vain they hawked and spat and trumpeted; the great American Cold had them by the nose. All they could do in their misery was to reduce companionway and deck to a condition best

left undescribed. But it was this more than any other thing that made the heart of the unhappy Hildegarde to falter and grow faint.

There were moments when, too chilled to sit still, worn out with tramping up and down, wet, and yet more miserable by reason of certain sights and sounds, she, nevertheless, rather than face the greater horror below, would stay on deck all day, wondering a little sometimes that she could suffer so much acute physical misery and yet not rue her coming. For even now, the moment she envisaged a possible escape—a passing yacht that should take her luxuriously home, or any pleasant miracle of rescue—she discovered that come what would, she was not only bound to keep on, but as determined to see it through as she had been that night of Louis's return, when, innocent of most that it implied, she had said she would go and bring her father home.

In the carrying out of her resolution there was nothing, as yet, to be afraid of in the sense she vaguely had supposed her brothers and Louis Cheviot to mean, but of sheer physical wretchedness and soul-sickness, enough and to spare for the chastening of any spirit.

There had been a good deal of heavy drinking in the last day or two. As for Curlyhead's father, he seemed never to be sober, and yet he had wits enough left, as well as cash, to bear a hand in endless games of poker. At first there had been little card-playing. But now, as people began to grow used to the motion, they crawled out of their berths to look at the world from the upper-deck, shiver and go below. Down there, what was there to do but the one thing? If you played once, you played every day, and all day, and more than half the night.

People who could n't as yet sit at the table to eat, sat there between meals breakfasting, dining, supping off "chips" and bits of pasteboard—not missing fleshpots, since always a jackpot graced the board. There were those who grudged the meal hours. Glowering upon the people who used the tables for mere eating, they stood about impatient till a place was cleared and the real business of poker might begin.

The same thing went on straight through the ship. According to the giant, they were as hard at it in the second-class as they were in the first, and on down as far as the horrible berths went, wherever men could get a board or a barrel-head, there they were with cards in their hands.

Not men only. And not only the woman with the sealskin jacket and the diamond ear-rings (did she sleep as well as eat and play in these adornments?); other women, too, sat at the absorbing game.

"Are they really gambling?" Hildegarde had asked the giant, the first time he found her in a group looking on.

The giant had laughed and said, "Don't they look it?"

"No. They are so—so quiet."

"That 's when they 're plunging worst."

"You mean they 're making large sums of money here now, and take it like that?"

"Yes, and losing, too, and take it just the same. It 's only in books that gamblers gurgle and gasp."

But even the cheerful giant had seemed to feel this was no place for Miss Mar. "Are n't you coming upstairs?" As she still lingered fascinated, "I 've been getting some oranges for you."

"How?"

"Out of a crate that 's bust."

"Your crate?"

"Everybody's crate."

Hildegarde laughed. He was so exactly like a great school-boy proposing a raid on an orchard. "I 've got oranges of my own," she said.

"Yes, but these are tangerines," and he led the way.

Very few people up there in comparison with the crowds in saloon and smoking-room. Mrs. Blumpitty asleep under sodden blankets; a group of men, tarpaulin over their knees, crouched in a sheltered corner smoking pipes and talking plans; a furry apparition sitting near the edge of the deck on a bollard—Ruth Sears in a long wolfskin coat, barely out of reach of the rain, a very solitary little figure bent over a book. Hildegarde went by unsteadily, and as the ship lurched Ford O'Gorman caught and saved her from falling. He kept hold of her till he had anchored her safely aft among the crates of fruit.

"I 'm very glad you did n't, but how was it," said Hildegarde, stripping off the loose jacket of a purloined tangerine, "how was it you did n't go by the *Congress*, after all?"

To her astonishment the red of the sunburnt cheek above her shoulder deepened and spread all over O'Gorman's face, but he spoke quite naturally, and even offhand. "Oh, I was afraid I was n't going to get all my freight on board the *Congress*."

But that sudden red in so stalwart a visage lit a danger signal. It was ridiculous to suppose, and yet, was this going to be the trouble Louis Cheviot had dreaded

for her? She had up till then suffered no check in the comfort of the giant's cheerful companionship; but was she being too much with him? She recalled Ruth Sears' gentle but speculative eyes, raised a moment from "The Little Minister," to follow the pair as they passed.

"I 'm going to talk with Mrs. Blumpitty's niece awhile," Miss Mar announced suddenly. The giant stared. With a conscious effort and a letting down of spirits, Hildegarde turned from him, encountering Mr. Matt Gedge, the sharp-faced young man who had been in the crowd on the Seattle wharf and had satirized her "bright idear" of looking after her baggage.

"Is O'Gorman," he began, and then looking past her, "—*thought* if the lady was here you would n't be far. Say!" he arrested Miss Mar. "Has he told you there 's robbers aboard this ship?"

"Robbers? No! What makes you think—"

"There 's a woman down in the second saloon—all she 's got in the world 's been swiped."

"But they 've started a collection for her," said O'Gorman.

"Yep, we 've fixed up the collection and we 've fixed up a Vigilance Committee. Come along, it was your idear, so let 's go and give her the money."

"Oh, you can do that," said O'Gorman. "But hold on a minute. Make it sixty-six for luck." He fished in his pocket. "I guess she 's spent more than a dollar's worth of worry."

Hildegarde stopped by the immobile figure still reading. "That 's a good warm coat you 've got," she said.

"Yes"—Ruth looked up with absent eyes—"but it 's too long."

"Is it! I should think it kept your ankles good and warm."

"Y-yes." She looked at the unspeakably filthy deck, and tucked the skirts of her coat tighter round her.

"I see the good of a short skirt here," Hildegarde's eyes followed hers, "and it looks very niče on you, too."

"I 'm glad," said the girl, "if you don't think it 's too short." Then she told Hildegarde about her life up in Alaska, how she had traveled, and cooked, and nursed, and hunted, and cured skins, and followed the trail; and did each and everything the better for wearing a skirt to the knee.

"But it 's hard after we 've worked so, my aunt and me, to see men looking at us in that way as if they thought we were—were, you know, the wrong kind. Just because we try to adapt ourselves to the life."

"Some people might not understand; but surely these men—"

With her head Ruth Sears made a little motion of negative. Slight as it was, it admitted no supposition of there being any doubt about the matter. "They 'd rather we all wore trailing skirts and diamond earrings."

"It 's really rather nice of them, in a way," said Miss Mar.

But the one who had had the experience was less free to discover in the charge a survival of the starved spirit of romance. "That Mr. Tod," Ruth went on, "he was up there last year. I 've cooked him many a dinner. Only yesterday I heard him agreeing with a lot of men that he would n't like to see *his* daughter going about in

such a short dress, and all the while he was talking he was spitting on the deck."

More here for the eye that could see than a base-mannered churl discussing feminine attire. He, in his way, was dealing with one of the important questions of the age. Also he had on his side many a learned and fastidious critic of society, for all that the great current of the future was set the other way. Some inkling of this last reached Hildegarde, and it reached her through a dawning sense of her own unfitness. She would never be in the vanguard with skirts kilted high for action. She was one of those who would cling to the outworn modes. For all that, she would for the rest of her life understand some things better because of these strange days in the microcosm of the ship.

While the third dinner was being cleared away, Hildegarde looked into the music-room. A dilapidated young woman, at the dilapidated piano, singing a comic song, and the cross-eyed man accompanying on the flute. A number of people sat about on the few rickety chairs and the many boxes and bundles, listening in a kind of painful trance, or passing back and forth over the wooden lattice of the raised flooring between which and the boards below escaped bilge-water slopped about with the motion of the ship and too frequently came to the surface.

Mrs. Locke was not there at all events. As Hildegarde turned away from the noisome-smelling place a well-dressed woman of about forty, who had been leaning on the piano (undisturbed, apparently, by the highly abnormal sounds it gave forth), followed Miss Mar to ask: "How is the sick lady in your room?" Miss Mar knew

her interlocutor to be Mrs. David M. Jones, but they had not spoken before.

"There are two still sick," Hildegarde answered.

"I mean the one they 're afraid 's got smallpox?"

Miss Mar opened her wide eyes very wide indeed. Even Louis had never thought of that chance. "I had n't heard about it," she said. And presently, "Do you know where Mrs. Locke is?"

"I think she 's gone to get the doctor," answered the ex-governor's wife. "I had meant to be in the room you and she are in. Pretty satisfied now to be out of it." With which she returned to the festive scene.

Even Hildegarde, who was so little nervous, would ordinarily have found her self-possession shaken by the news that she had been sleeping for nearly a week within two feet of so contagious and foul a disease; but she took the information more quietly than can well be credited by any one who has never cut the ties that bind us to resourceful yet care-filled civilized life.

Those who have once severed the thousand threads find not only some hardship and heartsoreness, but certain natures find, too, the larger calm that only perfect acquiescence gives. It is not all loss to be unable to run from danger. You gain a curious new sense of the inevitableness that lies at the roots of life, a sense smothered in the country and forgotten in the town. And this calm that walks the perilous places of our earth with its front of untroubled dignity and its steadfast eyes, this gain amongst many losses was not denied the girl faring North for knowledge and for old devotion's sake.

"Yes," the steward said, Mrs. Locke was in her cabin. As she went toward it, Hildegarde wondered if it were

written among the things to be that she herself should die there, and would Louis be hearing one day how they 'd buried her in Bering Sea. She opened the door, and there was the object of her quest looking on at a strange and sufficiently horrible spectacle. Stretched full length upon the floor, in her nightgown, lay the Dutch woman speechless, with a face swollen and scarlet. The ship's doctor, standing astride of her huge hulk, bent over and peering under the heavy eyelid, which he had forced back with his thumb, looked into the rolled-up eye. Hildegarde, with noiseless lips, made the question, "Smallpox?" Mrs. Locke answered, in a low voice, "Smallpox! No. Lack of self-control." How this worked out Hildegarde did not wait to inquire. It was too ugly to see that big woman lying there under such conditions, and the place smelt of alcohol.

But outside it was hardly better. The card players had gathered like flies settling down upon the remains of a feast, and at the end of the saloon three men were quarreling. Through an atmosphere thick, horrible, rose the angry voices. Was there going to be a fight? One might face death, even from smallpox, and yet not know quite how to accept life among sights and sounds like these.

"What 's the matter?" said Mrs. Locke, catching Hildegarde just outside their door. "You 're not afraid! I tell you it is n't smallpox."

"I know. That 's not it." The girl leaned against the wall. Two of the angry men had combined against the third. His chief means of defense seemed to be blasphemy. They hurt the ears, those words. She felt an inward twist of humiliation as she remembered that

Louis had said rather than see a sister of his go to Nome with the gold rush he 'd see her—

"Then what *is* the matter?" asked the woman at her side, watching her with an odd intentness. "I suppose this is n't the first time you 've heard a man swear."

"The matter is— I feel as if what I 'd seen and heard here would leave some sort of lasting stain. As if I 'd gone through filth and some of it would stick to me for ever."

"No, you don't. You 're only thinking of what some man might think." Hildegarde caught her breath with the surprise of guilty recognition, as Mrs. Locke's soft voice insisted: "Knowing does n't hurt a woman. Not the right sort of woman. But it does change us. You 'll find life will always look a little different to you after this."

Bella had said something like that!

"It 's curious," the woman went on, "how hard we struggle to live up to men's standard of our ignorance. After all, their instinct about it is quite right."

"Instinct about what?"

"That if we knew the truth, the truth would make us free."

"The truth might make frightened slaves of some of us."

"Only of the meanest."

"And you think men don't want us free?" Hildegarde asked wearily.

"A very few may. There are more of the other sort."

"Well, I know one man," said the girl, cleansing consciousness with the vision, "one man who is the kind you 'd say was an exception. I 'm sure his not wanting

me to come on this journey was just a natural shrinking from seeing any girl face hardships."

Mrs. Locke set her fine little face like marble. "This entire ship might have been full of girls facing hardships, and it would n't have cost him a pang. But I can well believe your coming did."

"Ah, you see, you don't know him."

The other shook her head. "Even the best men have n't got so far as to want to respect *all* women. Their good-will, their helpfulness, are kept in water-tight compartments, reserved for particular women. The rest may go to the everlasting bonfire."

"No, no, no."

"Yes, it seems even to help them in being specially nice to some—"

"What helps them?"

"To have been brutes to others." Mrs. Locke turned to go back into the horrible little cabin. "The best fellow I ever met told me that no man knew how to treat a woman who had n't stood over the grave of one he 'd loved."

"Well, I say again, you don't know the sort of man I— Why, even that dreadful Matt Gedge—even he goes and collects money for the poor woman in the second class."

"I never said they would n't show kindness when the notion took them. It 's justice they don't understand." And with that she went back to the woman who was having a fit on the floor.

Up on deck Hildegarde found a gale blowing. Where was the giant? The chicken-merchant, joining Miss Mar at the door, held on to his slouch hat while he inquired

significantly after the health of the purser. Miss Mar had not heard he was indisposed? "Oh, yes, you ought to go and see him. It 's nothin' catchin'—calls it bronchitis. Reckon it 's heart trouble," and he cackled like the most elated of his hens.

Again she came down-stairs, wandering aimlessly about, and then stopping by a little knot of lookers-on at the eternal game. In that childish mood, that may once in a while fall upon even a reasonable girl, she thought vaguely that if she stood long enough before this spectacle held to be unfit for feminine eyes, the giant would certainly come again and take her away. But the giant did nothing of the kind, and presently she forgot him. She usually forgot things when she watched this particular group of players. She had been arrested just here, unbeknown to the giant, a couple of nights before on her way to bed. In front of where Hildegarde stood, Governor Reinhart was giving up his seat to an eagerly waiting claimant. "They are beginning to play too high for me," his Excellency observed affably to Miss Mar.

"Who is winning?"

"That woman over there. She 's a holy terror."

"Not that one with the gentle face and the pointed chin?"

"Yes. Very pleasant and soft-spoken, too. Wife of the man next—playing with the professional gambler gang. They don't tackle *her*. She 's a corker with the cards!"

It was incredible that he should be speaking of that singularly modest and well-bred-looking woman, who followed the game with eyes that never lifted but once all

the while Hildegarde stood there. It was when the last of her husband's shrinking pile of chips was swept from him by the man opposite, that the woman, playing her own stiff game, not looking right nor left, must still have been acutely conscious of the full extent of the disaster at her side. The loser's only comment was "My deal!" as he picked up the cards afresh. Then it was that she turned the white wedge on her pointed face, laid a hand on the dealer's arm, and quite low, "*Don't* Jim!" she said, as though she hoped to influence him with her own hand full of cards. Naturally, he paid no heed, and each in the death-like silence, each went on with the game. There was something almost unnerving to the onlooker in the strained quiet of the woman. Was she winning or losing now? No hint of which in the pointed white mask, while she sat a little droop-shouldered, her arms lying on the table as if paralyzed, moving only her long supple fingers, gathering in or throwing out—unless she dealt, and even then moving about a tenth as much as any one else on either side up or down the long board. After what Governor Reinhart had said, each night on her way to bed, Hildegarde had paused a fascinated instant watching this woman; or by a group lower down where Curlyhead's father was, often with his little boy on his knee. While the elders played, the five-year-old would sit quiet as a mouse staring wisely at his father's cards, seeing in them his first picture-book, learning them for his earliest lesson.

Hildegarde had watched it all before, but on this particular wet evening the spectacle assailed an unpanoplied spirit. It was horrible. She would never get the picture out of her head. Even when she should be at home again,

doing delightful things with dear and happy people, she would remember this and the light would go out of the day. For it would be going on still. Somewhere, there would be people like these wasting and besmirching the flying, irrecoverable hours. Women, too, *women!* Something choked in her throat. She felt that she must strike the table and cry out: "Listen, listen! You have n't ever heard. Life is beautiful and good, and you 've never known that—poor, poor people. But I have come to tell you. Stop playing with those pieces of painted paper and listen to my good news!"

But of course they 'd only think she was mad. Oh, why had she come! With a tension as of tears, crowding, straining the muscles of her throat, she turned away to face again the wind-driven sleet of the deck. She dragged her steps to the dirty companionway. From the smoking-room above came the giant's great laugh, punctuating some one's story, and what so melancholy to certain moods as the sound of distant merriment! It becomes for us the symbol of all that greater gladness out of our reach, attainable to happier men. No light as yet, except in the saloon behind her. All the rest of the ship shrouded in the early-gathering shadows of a stormy evening. A passion of loneliness swept over her. As her foot touched the first step, some one came close behind.

"Is that you?" said a voice she did not recognize. A touch, a whisky breath blowing foul in her face, and without lifting her eyes or even uttering a sound she fled up the stair, meaning to make straight for Mrs. Blumpitty's rain-soaked pallet. Half-way up she saw in the gloom above her the blaze of a match, and there was the

Arctic Cap, his back turned to her, holding up the lighted match to read the run on the notice board. As Hildegarde's eyes fell in that vivid instant on the square shoulders, something in outline or attitude set her heart to beating so wildly, that, still flying on, she stumbled. With a little cry she put out a hand and felt herself steadied as the match fell to darkness. In a turmoil of wonder and wild hope her cheek had brushed the coat sleeve one lightning instant before she recovered firm footing and stood erect with apology on her lips.

The ship's doctor and the purser came hurriedly out of the smoking-room. But the Arctic Cap was turned away when the sudden light streamed out. A banging door, hurrying steps, and Hildegarde was peering in the dark after an indistinguishable face, hoping things she knew both impossible and mad, only to find herself standing there alone, with thumping pulses.

CHAPTER XIX

THE Arctic Cap had vanished from the ship. Every one else able to be afoot appeared on deck the next morning in the clear and strangely milder weather. Even the purser was abroad, passing by with averted eye, receiving haughtily the homage of the fair who hastened to inquire after his health, thereby further emphasizing Miss Mar's neglect. She sat watchful but silent in the sunshine, drinking in the air that seemed to bring a blessing with it from some golden land that yesterday had been far off, and that to-day was very near. Mrs. Blumpitty had resumed the perpendicular and her most cheerful air. All the Blumpitty "outfit" in the best of spirits. The business woman to the company was exhibiting her vaunted competency in "dealing with men" and "affairs" by industrious prosecution of her flirtation with the oldest dentist. Shifting groups of lawyers, "judges," senators, were cheerfully objurgating the mining laws. The lean bean-feaster, who between meals was for ever chewing gum, paused in his nervous pacing of the deck, though not in his labor of mastication, to assure ex-Governor Reinhart that he was "dead wrong." This seemed, on the face of it, improbable. But Reinhart condescended to remind him, "Nome is n't like any other camp. Wait till you see the state of things *there*."

"Have."

"Been there?"

The bean-feaster had an audience before you could wink, for he had nodded, chewing harder than ever. Then a pause long enough for him to say modestly, "I 'm the man appointed by the Nome miners to go in the commission to Washington and report."

"Why did n't you go?"

"Did. Coming back now." With immense respect all within earshot listened to the disquisition on Alaskan mining laws, and the bean-feaster's modest assurance that through his exertions they were being amended.

Some one aft in the steerage was playing the fiddle, and a couple of darkies were dancing. The older woman is Mrs. L'Estrange's cook, and Mrs. L'Estrange is the Southern lady of fallen fortunes who is going, with a store of fine damask and all her family silver, to open a high-class boarding-house at Nome! She had read of Mrs. Millicent Egerton Finney, who, in the Klondike, by this means, had made a "pile."

Mrs. Locke's admirer, Mr. Meyer, was displaying a small working model of a superfine contrivance, only to discover that every man on the ship had a superfine contrivance of his own which was the grandest thing on earth in the way of gold-saving. Many of the people, as they moved from group to group, greeted Mrs. Locke and Miss Mar; but to Hildegarde's intent eye all other faces were just merely not the one under the arctic cap.

Her companion watched the whale birds that swarmed so low this morning over the water. Every now and then a fountain spouted up into the sunshine.

But when Hildegarde, distracting herself an instant

from her own watch, said, "Do you suppose it 's true those birds feed off barnacles on the whale's back?"—Mrs. Locke's little concern for what she stared at was evident in her answering, "There 's one thing I don't understand."

"What 's that?"

"You don't seem to have much to say to your friend, the purser."

"My friend?"

"Yes."

"He is n't my friend."

"Oh."

"What made you think—"

"Merely that he seemed to be when you came on board."

"You mean because he let me get into my room before the crowd came?"

"Well, that was real friendliness, but it was n't what I meant."

"What did you mean?"

"Oh, I only thought, since you called him by his Christian name, he might be a friend." The tone conveyed the widest latitude—the most varied experience of other women's vagaries, or their weakness.

"*I* called him by his Christian name!" ejaculated Hildegarde.

"Yes."

"When in the world?"

"That very first night."

"You must be dreaming."

Mrs. Locke shook her head. "Of course it 's no crime. I did n't mean that."

"Crime? No. It would have been lunacy. But I never did it."

Mrs. Locke opened a little book that lay in her lap.

Hildegarde leaned forward. For the first moment since waking she forgot the Arctic Cap. "Do help me to understand. What did I say?"

Mrs. Locke's clear brown eyes looked into the earnest face of the girl, and then a little unwillingly, "It was n't in the least my business," she added.

"What did you think you heard?"

"Did n't the purser come to the door asking if Miss Mar was 'all right'? And did n't you call out, 'Is that you, Louis?' and did n't you run after him?" As Hildegarde's perplexed face yielded to a gleam of horrified enlightenment, "Of course it was n't any business of mine," Mrs. Locke repeated, and looked intently at the sea-birds flocking in a new place.

"Do you—do you mean you think his name is—"

"I don't think. I know his name is Louis Napoleon Brown."

Hildegarde gasped out, "Then that was why!"

"Why—"

"Why he was so—surprising. *His* name daring to be Louis! The *purser!* Oh, dear. Oh, *dear,*" and the girl began suddenly to laugh, and grew more and more convulsed the longer she thought about it, till she became hysterical. Mrs. Locke looked gravely at her, even frowning slightly.

"Oh, dear. Oh, dear. He thought I meant him. Oh! oh!"

"You did n't?"

"And you think you know the world. You called me an infant."

"Well, I own I never could make it square with the rest of you."

"Oh, I must make you understand. You see I was expecting a great friend of mine—an old friend of all our family was coming to see me off; at least, I hoped he was. When I heard that somebody was asking for me, I was sure it was—" Up and down the deck her eye went roving. She lowered her voice—"a man called Louis Cheviot." And she told Mrs. Locke what he was like, this old friend. "You see the reason I jumped so quickly to the conclusion he was asking for me, is that he never before failed me. He 's been a quite uncommon sort of friend. He 's the man I 've once or twice mentioned." (Mrs. Locke kept her lips from smiling, "once or twice!") "Though I never said what his name was. I told you about his hunting up my father and staying with him all those months; about his coming out with dogs over the ice, just to bring us word; and that kind of thing. He 's a very particular friend of all of us. And then he 's the most wonderful company. He makes you always see the fun of things. And you— Yes, life is always more interesting, somehow, when he 's there. Did you ever know anybody like that?"

"He did n't, after all, come to see you off. Yes, I 've known some one like that."

Hildegarde turned her head suddenly. Up the deck and down the deck the wide eyes vainly traveled. How had it come that she had felt so sure? What had she to go on? A likeness in the shoulder outline. Something the same trick in the carriage of the head. A pang shot through her. "Yes," she said, as though agreeing that he had failed her, "I 've often said to myself, 'To

think of his never even saying good-by.' '' (Yet she had been imagining— A dullness fell upon her that was worse than acute disappointment.) ''He was angry,'' she went on. ''We had quarreled, because I would go to Nome.''

''He was right and you were wrong,'' said Mrs. Locke.

Hildegarde smiled. She rather liked this woman for veering round and taking his part. ''Well, all the same, I thought it was n't very nice of him not to send me any sign of forgiveness at the last. And the odd thing is'' (her spirits revived a little in the act of talking about this old friend) ''it was so unlike Louis Cheviot. He can be rather severe, but he never sulks. He 's the kind of person'' (Hildegarde had no idea how often she had said ''he is the kind of person''), ''the kind that always looks after his friends. And no matter how badly they treat him he goes on looking after them. He was like that even when he was little. His sister once told me a thing about him that just shows you what kind of— He was seven years old, Barbara said, and the most fiery little patriot you ever heard of. And in other ways, yes, I 've often thought there could never have been a little boy so like the grown man as this child was like the Louis Cheviot I know.'' She said it with an air of one making an effective point.

''Is that so?'' said Mrs. Locke, telling herself she had n't realized how handsome the girl was until this morning.

''Just to give you an idea. He had a perfect passion, his sister says, for making a noise. Yes, but more than any boy she ever knew. You had only to say fire-crackers to make Louis explode with enthusiasm. The only

reason he wanted to grow up was so that he could get a gun, and he 'd rather let off torpedoes than eat pie. No picnic or birthday or holiday of any sort was the real thing unless he could make a fearful rumpus. And the day he lived for the year round was the Fourth of July. Yes, yes, I know most American boys are like that, only Louis was more so than any boy you ever heard of. So his sister says. Well, I forgot to tell you when he was two his father died awfully in debt. For years the Cheviots were so poor they did n't always have enough bread. So they were naturally pretty short of fire-crackers. And for those early years poor little Louis had to get his fun out of other boys' noise."

"Ah, the thing is to make it yourself." Mrs. Locke spoke with the accent of one who makes the wider application.

"Of course." Hildegarde nipped the generalization in the bud. "Well, he learned very early that if he was to have even a little Fourth of July he had to save up for it. And he did. When he got a nickel or two he would n't waste it on candy, and he did n't even buy chewing-gum. Just saved up for July. The year he was seven his mother had to give up trying to live in part of their nice big house. They moved into a very small cottage on the other side of the garden. But Louis and his cousins, and the rest of the little boys of the neighborhood, were going to have the greatest and most glorious Fourth they 'd any of them ever known. The others had toy pistols and rockets and little cannon. Louis had saved up and had got some fire-crackers and two little flags, and he was going to make things hum. Well, there was a man who had just moved into the Cheviots' big

house and nobody liked him, but I expect they would n't have liked anybody who lived in that house without being a Cheviot. And he had a little boy about Louis's age. And the little boy was very ill. Scarlet fever. Well, on the evening of the third (you know they never can wait till the Fourth), the boys all over town began to celebrate, but they were going to celebrate most just in front of Louis's house, for that was where the great fight was to be—the battle, you know, where they were going to beat the British all over again. It was always more fun, and lots more noise and slaughter if Louis was one of the generals. So they came trooping down the street after supper, letting off torpedoes by the way. And when Louis heard them he tore out with his flags and his crackers, wild with excitement. And he lined the boys up and told them where the red-coats were in ambush behind the wood house. Louis had lit some punk, and the new neighbor came rushing out just as a big cracker went off with a bang. Barbara Cheviot was on her side of the laurel and she saw the man throw up his hands as though he 'd been shot, and then make for Louis exactly as if he meant to strike him. Barbara was scared for a moment. But by the time the new neighbor got to where the boys were he was holding himself down pretty well. Barbara heard him speaking quite kindly. What were they going to do, and that kind of thing. And when they told him, Barbara says a sound like a little groan came out of his tight lips, and he looked up at the window where the curtains were drawn. But he asked the boys how many more crackers they had. And when he saw what a lot there were, he only said that was fine to have so many. When he was a little boy he had

to share one pack with three brothers. And he said he hoped they knew what the Fourth of July meant and why they had a right to be proud and make a noise. Louis answered up and told him. The man said 'Good, good!' He did n't want to put a stop to the fun, he said. He was only thinking about the little boy up in that room there, who was n't having any Fourth of July at all this year. He was ill. So ill he might never see another July. Yes, he was probably dying, and Barbara says, he could n't go on for a minute. He had to wait. And all the little boys looked down at the ground. 'There 's just a chance, I think,' the father said, 'if he sleeps to-night, just a little chance—if you boys would celebrate on the other side of the town. And I 'd be very much obliged to you,' he said. As he was going off he turned to Louis and asked him if he 'd tell all the boys he saw, and try to keep them from coming into this street. Louis said, Yes, he would, and the man went back to his child. But he did n't go to bed—just sat in the sick-room and watched. The oddest thing about that third of July was that Mrs. Cheviot and the girls slept the whole night through. It was the only year of their lives *that* ever happened. There was n't a sound in their street. But the man in the big house was too anxious and miserable about the sick child to notice or remember anything outside that room where they were all watching. Just before sunrise the crisis was passed, and the doctor, who 'd been sent a long way for, and had been watching, too, said the fever had gone down and the boy was saved. The father came out for a breath of air. In the grayness he saw something moving down by the fence. 'Who 's that?' he called out,

and when he got close up he saw a little figure patroling the dim street. 'Why, are n't you the boy—' he began to say. 'Yes,' Louis told him, 'I 'm doin' what I said.' 'What you said?' The man did n't remember even then. 'Yes,' Louis said, 'I 'm bein' a sort o' watchman to see the boys don't make a noise just here.' And he had a bunch of fire-crackers in his hand and two little flags in his hat."

With suffused eyes the girl looked out across the shining water. The old story had a new significance for her, if none at all for Mrs. Locke.

"It was, as I began by saying, more exactly like the Louis Cheviot I know than a whole book of biography might be. It 's because he 's precisely like that to this day that I was so surprised when he let me go off without a word, because, you see, he 'd been 'sort o' watchman' for us, too. It 's easier to believe that nothing else will do for him but just to see you through." She turned her head, and her grasp on the railing tightened—nothing else had done! For that figure outlined against the sky—no use any longer that he turns his collar up above his ears, no efficient mask any more the arctic cap. That was the "watchman" yonder on the bridge, standing guard over the fortunes of Hildegarde Mar!

"What 's the matter? What *is* it?" asked Mrs. Locke.

"Only—only that the most wonderful thing that ever happened is happening right now."

"What 's happening?"

"The man I 've been telling you about—he 's there!"

"Not that one on the bridge!"

"Hush. 'Sh. Don't stir. I must be very quiet."

"Because you are n't sure?"

"Because I am. Oh-h—"

Mrs. Locke looked steadily into Hildegarde's face for an instant, before she turned away.

The girl leaned forward. "No, no. It 's not *that*," she said, and from under the brim of her hat she sent another glance to the figure against the sky. "He 's made a lot of money in the North—he has all kinds of business interests up here."

"How long have you known he was on board?"

"I almost think that in the back of my head I suspected before, but I did n't know till last night. And I was n't *sure* till this minute," she added, with girl's logic.

"You have n't spoken at all—you two?"

Hildegarde shook her head.

"Why do you think he wants to spy on you?"

"Oh, Louis does n't want to *spy*." Her tone convicted the suggestion of rank absurdity. "I told you he 's been dreadfully angry. Too angry to write. Perhaps too angry to speak." Was that it? Again the upward glance. "But"—she clutched at the inalienable comfort—"it 's Louis Cheviot."

"Well, don't be too certain this time, that 's all."

Not be certain? But that was just what she must be. Another quick look, and lo! the bridge was empty. "I 'm quite, quite sure—but I—I 'll just go and see."

He was standing near the door of the chart-room. As Hildegarde's head came up the figure vanished. When she reached the threshold there it was, back turned to the door, cap bent over a map. Incredible to her now that she had n't known him all along; but, nevertheless, she stood wavering, seized by something else than mere ex-

citement—a wholly unexpected shyness. Was he indeed nursing that old anger against her? Was it conceivable he wanted to avoid her the whole voyage? She half turned back, telling herself that at all events something was the matter with her tongue—it was a physical impossibility for her to speak. Then the next thing was, she heard her own voice saying quite steadily, with even a faint ring of defiance, "It 's no use! I 've found you out!"

The figure flashed about, and Hildegarde caught the shine in the black-fringed eyes as he pulled off the cap, leaving his hair ruffled. He held out his hand, laughing, but, as it would almost seem, a little shamefaced. "Well, it took you long enough."

"No wonder!" She felt an imperative need to prevent her gladness from appearing excessive. "You can't ever say again there 's nothing of the actor in you."

"Why can't I?"

"After masquerading all these days?"

"I did n't mean to masquerade."

"Why did you go about in that horrid cap then, and never speak to me, or—"

"Oh, I never meant to stay incog. I was only waiting—"

"What for?"

"My opportunity; and it never came."

"What opportunity?"

"Well"—he leaned against the lintel, and he was smiling in that old whimsical way of his—"I suppose what I was waiting for was your getting into some sort of scrape."

"You were hoping for that!" but while she denounced him, she, too, was smiling.

"Well, I had prophesied it. I suppose a prophet usually has a weakness for seeing his wisdom verified."

She laughed out as light-heartedly as though the journey had been without care or cloud. "And you did n't like your prophecy not to come true. Poor false prophet! No wonder you hid your face."

"Yes, as for pretending—no, it is n't any earthly use. The truth is, I expected that very first evening to step in at some psychological moment."

"Save-my-life sort of thing?"

"Well, save you some anxiety or discomfort at the least. But you were the one passenger on the ship who did n't suffer the one or the other."

(Ah, he did n't know! And she was n't going to tell him. Oh, dear, no!)

"I go to see about your baggage. It 's checked, and on the ship. I curry favor with the captain, so as to get you a seat at the first table. You 've got one for yourself."

"No. *I* did n't."

"Well, whoever got it, you sit in it. Same thing on deck. While I 'm looking for a sheltered place for your chair you are established. I bring special provisions to keep you from starvation. You are somehow as well supplied and with as exactly the right things as though you 'd made the trip twenty times."

"It was the Blumpittys," Hildegarde began.

"The whattatys? Never mind. Call it any name you like. *I* could n't have promised you new-laid eggs every morning for breakfast a thousand miles from land. I could only hang about ready to save you from unpleasantness. But, God bless me, unpleasantness never comes within a league of you."

"The purser," Hildegarde prompted, with a gleam of eye.

But he tossed the suggestion aside with, "A little over pleasantness that you 're able to check for yourself."

"It 's plain I 'm not the stuff romantic heroines are made of."

He did n't contradict that. "You certainly have n't given me much excuse for coming along."

She was glad he was n't looking her way at that moment. It was like him to declare his mission so simply, and yet he stood there in the sunshine, smiling philosophically, as he turned down his collar, saying, "The merest superfluity. That 's what I am. Except," he added more seriously, "that if I had n't come I should never have believed I was so little needed. So it turns out that what I 've come for is my own enlightenment."

"Not only your enlightenment," and her eyes invited him to understanding of a friend's gratefulness to a friend. But he lifted his bare head to the breeze that swept in with the sunshine at the open door, as though, having delivered himself of his grievance, he could think of nothing now but the comfort of being free of that all-enveloping cap. His eyes seemed to shine only for joy in the sun, as he stood there ruffling still more his short, wavy hair—the hair that did, as Bella said, "fit" him so uncommonly well. And he certainly looked as little sentimental as some sturdy mountain pine.

"Some people," Hildegarde remarked in a detached tone, "would think it was a waste for two old friends—we might have had all these days together."

"Yes. I give you my word I never meant—" He seemed to intend an apology as though he assumed the

deprivation to be chiefly, if not solely, hers. "The very first time I passed you I thought, of course, you 'd find me out. Then, as you did n't. I kept putting off—Morning, Captain."

"Morning!"

"I should think you did keep putting off!"

"I did n't want you to"—he lowered his voice—"I did n't want to take you by surprise before people."

"You thought the joy might be too much for me?" she demanded.

Cheviot looked at her with the swift speculation in his eye of the man who is thinking: "Now, is she going to insist on quarreling with me?" "This is the lady I was talking to you about, Captain. Pretty cool of me having her up here without asking you! Miss Mar—Captain Gillies. Now, the least I can do is to take her down," and, in spite of the captain's gruff civility, that was what Cheviot proceeded to do. "Don Quixote's signaling. Let 's go and see what 's up."

Hildegarde had not perceived that the gaunt old person below was making any unusual demonstration. He was always waving his arms and addressing the multitude. "I 've been rather afraid of that one," she confided.

"Afraid? Then it 's only because you don't know him. He 's the most interesting person on the ship."

"No, my Blumpitty 's the most interesting."

"Well, you show me your blumpitty and I 'll show you mine. Mine 's got an invention for pumping water for the placers."

"Mine 's got something far more wonderful."

"Don't believe you. Wait till you know about Don

Quixote 's 'systems of windmills'; they 're the greatest ever. I don't say his windmills will work at the mines; but they 've gone without a let-up, straight through the North Pacific and the Bering Sea. Windmills all the morning. Windmills every night. You must have heard as you passed him on the deck, 'Windmills,' 'Windmills.' No? Well, come along.''

Rather nice to be ''coming along'' with Louis once more. It was going to make a difference in this expedition.

Hildegarde got a compliment to her seamanship out of the fantastic old Alabaman. ''I 've watched this young lady,'' he informed Cheviot. ''She 's as happy in a 'norther' as one o' my windmills.'' And he sent a rattling laugh after them as they two went down the swinging deck.

''How different everybody looks to-day—it 's the sunshine.''

''Yes, I think they *do* look different.'' But he did not say it was the sunshine.

''I don't see my Blumpitty, nor, what 's more important, Mrs. Locke.''

''That 's the woman you 're so much with?''

''Yes. It looks as if she 'd gone below.'' What did it matter? Nothing mattered now. Miss Mar had a distinct sense of repressing a quite foolish sense of radiant content, not to say elation. How this having a friend along lit up the rude and sordid ship! Not the first time this particular friend had wrought this particular miracle in her sight. The fact that Louis's eyes rested on things constrained them to reveal an ''interestingness'' unsuspected before.

"There are my three financiers," she whispered. "They are n't as splendid as your Don Quixote, but they 're very nice to me at table."

"I 'm relieved to hear you 've found some one who contrives to be 'nice' there. I 've wondered how you were getting on," he chuckled.

The temptation to confess was strong upon her. But no. Even Louis would be obliged to say, "I told you so."

"At first," she said, with the detached air of the investigator, "I watched my neighbors, because *everything* they did was so surprising. But by and by I got so I could see nice distinctions and fine shades. Some of the roughest-looking have n't by any means the roughest manners."

"Oh, you 've discovered that, have you?"

"Yes. This man here"—it was necessary to draw close and to whisper again—"he 's Mr. Simeon Peters, from Idaho. He shouted across the table to me at dinner yesterday to pass the butter. He was just plunging his own knife into it as everybody at our table does."

"As everybody at every table does," Cheviot corrected.

"Well, but wait. You don't know how elegant we are down at our end. Mr. Sim Peters hesitated, and you could see a misgiving dawning behind his spectacles. He drew back just before he reached the butter-dish, and carefully and very thoroughly he licked his knife the whole length of the blade. Yes! Then he felt quite happy about plunging it in the public butter." She was able to laugh now at what had driven her from the table in that dark yesterday. Louis laughed, too; he even

carried his genial good-will the excessive length of joining in the conversation of those same financiers.

"Did you succeed in getting your plant on board?" he asked the nearest of the trio.

"Yes. But we had to pay another fellow to take off half his stuff to make room for ours," said financier number two.

"What process have you got?"

"Oh, the McKeown," said number three.

"And it 's the greatest ever?"

"That 's right," said all three together.

But why, Hildegarde wondered, why did he talk to financiers, when he might talk to her?

"Them innercents think that about the McKeown," said a grizzled man across Cheviot's shoulder, "only jest becuz they ain't never seen the Dingley workin'."

"You got the Dingley?" Cheviot asked; just as though it mattered.

"No good goin' to Nome 'nless y' *have* got the Dingley." And while Cheviot lingered to hear just why it was the Dingley could "lick creation," Hildegarde leaned against the stanchion, watching him with that interest the better-born American woman commonly feels in seeing something of what she has less opportunity for than any member of her sex in Europe, viz., the way her men folk bear themselves with men. She had the sense that again the American enjoys in its quiddity, of making acquaintance with a new creature, while observing her old friend in this new light. Cheviot was not only at his ease with these people, he put them at ease with him. They were content to reveal themselves, even eager before the task. Was it because he looked "a likely customer,"

or did men commonly turn to him? Now Mr. Isaiah Joslin and his sour-dough friend were pushing in between Hildegarde and the group where Cheviot had been buttonholed. Joslin was scoffing at the Dingley as well as the McKeown. "Yes, *sir!*"—he demanded Cheviot's attention by striking his fist in his palm under that gentleman's nose—"I 'll do more with a plain rocker that any feller can make for himself out of a store box and three sticks, than all these cheechalkers and their newfangled machines."

"Maybe that 's so," said a broad, squat Ohioan, the man Hildegarde had noticed before, going about the ship with a tiny bottle, a little square of sheet copper, and a deal of talk. "Maybe that 's right. But you old sour-doughs lost a terrible lot o' leaf and flour gold whenever you did n't use amalgam plates in your rockers."

" 'T ain't so easy gittin' plates."

" 'T is now!" said the Ohioan, producing, as it were, automatically, his little square of copper and his bottle of fluid.

"Quicksilver, is n't it?" Hildegarde came nearer Cheviot to ask.

"Quacksilver, I guess," but still he followed the discussion about the McKeown "process" as though Hildegarde had been a hundred miles away.

"Now, you just time me," the Ohioan was challenging Cheviot. "I can silver-plate this copper in twenty seconds by the watch." And he did it. The only person there who was not a witness to the triumph was the girl whose clear eyes seemed to follow the process with a look of flattering interest. Should she, after all, tell Louis,

not how glad, but just that she was glad of his coming? Had n't he earned that much? Not that he seemed to care greatly about acknowledgments from her. He seemed to have forgotten her existence already, and they had n't been together twenty minutes. All the simpler, then!

"I tell you what!"—the Ohioan had raised his voice and enlarged his sphere of influence—"I tell you there 's a lot o' poor prospectors would have been rich men today if only I 'd discovered sooner how to make amalgam plates this easy and this cheap."

"Cheap, is it?"

"Yes, a damned lot cheaper than losin' half your gold. Cheaper than linin' your rockers—yes, and your sluices, too, with silver dollars as some fellers did. Now, this little piece of copper"—he produced a new bit—"a child can turn that into an amalgam plate by my process. Here, let the lady show you." Before Hildegarde knew what was happening, the fragment of metal was in her hand and the owner had tipped the tiny bottle till a drop of the liquid ran out on the copper. "Quick! Rub it all over."

As she did so, she saw that Cheviot's attention was now undividedly hers. He did not look as if he altogether approved her acting as show woman. But not to disappoint the inventor, Hildegarde rubbed the silvered tip of her finger lightly and evenly over the copper. "Why, yes!" she cried out. "Look!" And as she held up the miraculous result the Ohioan roared with satisfaction, "Ain't I been tellin' you?" The copper was turned into a sheet of silver. "Rub and rub as hard as you like now"—he passed the object-lesson round—

"you can no more budge a particle of that stuff than you can rub off triple plate. And *that 's* what you want to line your rockers with!"

"Looks like that silverin' business might be worth somethin'. "

"Worth a clean million," says the Ohioan, as he pocketed his bottle of miracle and walked jauntily away in the sunshine.

Hildegarde and Cheviot, exchanging smiles, went on down the deck in his wake. But suddenly the Ohioan stopped and wheeled about in the direction of a voice that had just said: "No, siree, I ain't worrittin' with no Dingley and no nothin' I ain't never tried." The inventor of amalgam-plated copper, as though he 'd heard himself called by name, retraced his steps with a precipitation that nearly capsized Miss Mar. The gentleman who had just declined Dingley squared his shoulders and announced to all and sundry: "No, siree! Y' got to *show* me. I 'm from Missoura." Hildegarde caught at Cheviot's arm. "They 've got hold of our saying!"

"Oh, that 's everybody's saying now," he answered. "I 've heard it twenty times since I came on board." She waited, incredulous, listening. "If I got any minin' to do," the man from Missouri went on, "give *me* Swain's Improved Amalgamator every time. D' ye know what they done to test Swain's Improved Amalgamator?"

"Nop."

"Well, lemme tell yer. They took a gold dollar and they pulverized it."

"I 've pulverized many a dollar in my day," says a

gloomy and familiar voice. While the deck chuckled with sympathy. Hildegarde whispered, "That 's my Blumpitty."

"Well, sir," the other went on unmoved, "they passed that dollar in gold dust that I 'm tellin' y' 'bout, they passed it through a sixty-mesh sieve, and they mixed it good and thorough with a ton—a ton, sir, of gravel and sand. And they run that through Swain's Improved Gold Amalgamator, and what do you think they got?"

"Guess," says Mr. Blumpitty, "they got to know that any feller can pulverize a dollar—"

"Haw, haw."

"—but it 's the daisy that can pick one up."

"Well, sir, Swain's Improved Amalgamator 's jest that kind of a daisy. It picked up jest exactly ninety-eight cents out of that gold dollar." And every owner of a rival invention roared with derision.

"Oh, Mr. Purser!" Louis Napoleon Brown was hailed with a suddenness that arrested his steps, but did not deprive him of his haughty mien. "I find I owe you an apology," said Miss Mar.

His sternness of visage relaxed slightly. "Well, you *have* treated me mighty mean," he admitted in a low voice.

Cheviot was staring and making his way to the girl.

"Yes," she said, with a subdued air that might, to the purser, have seemed to be penitential, but she spoke so that Cheviot could hear, "You must have thought it very forward of me to call you 'Louis,' that first evening. I meant this gentleman, who is an old friend of mine. I 've only just realized how mystified you must

have been." Wherewith she took Cheviot's arm, and away the two went, leaving the purser transfixed.

Oh, the sun-warmed wind blowing in your face! Oh, this seeing the brave world, with a friend at your side!

"I don't remember you at meals," she said to him.

"I never was at meals."

"Where did you eat?"

"Up in the captain's room."

"Well, you won't any more, will you?"

"I don't know."

"You want us to eat apart!"

"I don't 'want.' But I can't turn anybody out of his seat, and they 're all taken."

Well, if he were content with this arrangement it hardly behooved her to protest. "Come and be introduced to my Blumpitty. I can tell from the look on his face exactly what he 's talking about."

"What?"

"Come and listen."

"Ya-as," Blumpitty was saying, ostensibly to Governor Reinhart, but really to a distinguished and rapidly increasing circle, "Ya-as, queerest feller ever I see."

"Who was?"

"Why, the feller I found dyin' on the coast up above Cape Polaris. The man that gave me the tip. I can see that feller now. Could n't get his face out o' my head fur months. His eyes—used t' see them eyes in my sleep." Blumpitty paused, and seemed to struggle feebly with an incubus. "Never see such eyes in any man's head 'fore nor since." Again he paused an instant to think out something. "Reckon it makes a man look like that."

"What does?" demanded the Governor.

"Knockin' up agin the Mother Lode."

"Oh, the Mother Lode!" said Reinhart, slightingly.

"Ya-as; those of us that 's practical miners"—his look weeded out the Governor—"guess we all know that every bit o' gold that 's found its way to the creek bottoms and the coast, it 's all come from the Mother Lode, off there in them low ground—down hills to the North."

The breathless respect with which this information was received by the rest, was broken in upon by the Governor's roaring a great infidel laugh. "Why, Joslin, here, tells me the gold comes out o' the sea!"

"Maybe he believes it," says Blumpitty, sympathetically.

"Believe it!" bellowed Isaiah, sticking his head over Dr. Daly's shoulder. "So 'll you believe it when you get to Nome. The further out you go at low tide the richer you 'll find it."

Blumpitty's pale-eyed pity for his delusion seemed to get on Joslin's nerves.

"Was n't I *there* when Jake Hitz and Tough Nut went way out with a wheelbarra'?"

"Any man can go out with a wheelbarra'," said Blumpitty.

"Yes, but it ain't every man can come back with pay dirt and rock out what they did."

Blumpitty just smiled.

"Twenty-two hundred dollars, sir!"

"Guess you were n't watchin' which way they went for that dirt?" said one of the capitalists.

"That 's right!" laughed his partner. "Tough Nut

must have got that twenty-two hundred out of the tundra."

"Hope that is n't where you fellows count on findin' gold," said Joslin, sympathetically.

"We just about are."

"Why, don't you know the tundra 's froze the year round?"

"That 's why we 're takin' up thawin' machines—$90,000 worth."

"Might as well take up ninety thousand pianners and play toons to the tundra."

As though this idea had some special significance for him, a poorly-dressed boy detached himself from the group with a cheerful whistling of the eternal Boulanger march.

"There 's a hell of a lot o' machinery goin'; I ain't sorry I 'm takin' in chickens m'self," observed Hildegarde's table companion.

Cheviot caught the eye of the whistling boy as he went by. "What are *you* taking in?"

The boy held up a banjo. "This!" he laughed, and went briskly back to the dancers in the steerage.

Hildegarde smiled into Cheviot's eyes. "Was n't that nice?" How easily he made people say amusing, revealing things. "Do you notice how happy everybody looks to-day?"

"Yes," he admitted. "The *Los Angeles* is a pretty dismal place, but most of these people have been happier on this horrible ship than they 've been for years. Happier, some of them, than they 've ever been before."

She did n't quite like him to speak so of the *Los Angeles*. Yesterday she would have agreed. But to-day—

"How do you know they 're happier here?" (Shame on him if *he* was n't. But it was just as well. Oh, much simpler!)

"Talk to them and you 'll see. Everybody on the ship has had the worst luck you ever heard of; and all through 'circumstances over which'!" His voice made a period, with that old trick of assuming a phrase complete, when you could finish it for yourself. "Even those that look prosperous like you and me, they 've all failed at the main business of life."

So far as she was concerned in this review she felt only impatience at his going back upon old loss and pain. What if you have been sorry and sad. It was n't the part of a friend to remind you of it. But if Louis must talk of failure here was a ship-load of it! She told herself this thought was the hag that was riding her happiness down. She looked round her. The world was a pretty terrible place, after all, "for the mass," that Mrs. Locke had taunted her with not caring about. The wind blew out a wisp of straight, fair hair till it played like a golden flame above the brim of her hat of Lincoln-green.

"A whole ship-load of failure!" she said aloud. A sense of the grim business life was for "the mass" pressed leaden, and the scarlet mouth closed pitiful upon the words, "Poor, poor people!" But Cheviot, with his eyes on that beguiling little flame of gold, was ready to reassure her. It did n't matter if every soul on board *had* seen unmerciful disaster follow fast and follow faster, up to the hour he set foot upon the ship. Hildegarde need n't waste her pity. Look at their faces, listen to them making incantations with McKeown and Dingley. Anything would do to work the spell. Why? Be-

cause the place they were bound for had the immense advantage of being unknown. No one could say of any of these contrivances, "It 's been tried." "Not a soul on the ship but has his thawing machine or his banjo, or—"

"Or her black cook."

He nodded. How well they understood each other, "*Some* talisman.

"What 's ours?" said the girl quickly.

"Our what?"

"Our talisman."

"Oh, I was n't thinking of us."

"Think now."

"I don't know."

"Well, I know what mine is."

"You won't tell me, I suppose."

"Why not?" She spoke lightly, even a little teasingly. "It 's a sort of rough diamond, my talisman. Or"—her sunny look flashed in his face—"perhaps it 's adamant. Which is the most unyielding?" Then, with sudden gravity, "It 's a wonderful thing, the trust you make people feel. Nothing can shake it."

"I thought we were talking about talismans."

"It makes every difficult thing seem easy. And it makes every dangerous thing seem safe."

"Well, it 's the very last effect I intend to produce!"

She swept his declaration aside. "Impossible to feel anything can go very wrong now that you 're here."

His face was so unmoved by this handsome tribute that she found herself venturing further. "I don't know why I should pretend I don't appreciate. I 've been so afraid these last days—"

He caught at that. "Afraid, were you?"

"Afraid that one of us two would die before I had a chance to tell you." Should she go on? She had meant to write—it was different saying it.

"Tell me what?"

"That I 've got over minding your having opposed me so." If she expected any outburst of joy on his part she was denied the spectacle. "I 've come to understand such a lot of things on board this ship." She waited an instant, but he leaned over the railing quite silent, staring down into the water. "Among other things," she went on, "I see when I look back that you 've always been the one to bring me strength. A feeling that I 'd set my feet upon the rock—"

"And it was n't rock, after all, what you set your feet on," he said quietly.

She tightened her hands on the railing, and something like veiled warning crept into the words: "You 've made me feel *safer,* Louis, than any one else in the world. I owe you a great deal for that."

"Oh, *owe!*" He turned away impatiently.

Not the sea-birds sweeping so low over the water that their white feather brooms raised a dust of silver in the sunlight; not the motley crew upon the ship half as clear to the girl's vision as that little figure with the flags in his hat patroling a deserted street in the dawn. "One reason people depend on you so is, I suppose, because they see as I do, it is n't only that you 're good to some particular one. You 'd be good to anybody."

"Oh, would I!"

"Just as you gave up your Fourth of July to be watchman for the neighbor's boy."

"How did you get hold of that yarn?"

"Barbara—"

"Well, look here"—he moved his square shoulders uneasily, like one in an ill-fitting coat. "Look here, if you 're thinking of trying to make a hero out of me—it is n't any earthly—"

"Hero? Nonsense. We were talking about talismans," she said, with recovered gaiety. "I have n't brought along a machine of any sort, and I have n't got a black cook. Not even a banjo! But I 've got a friend!" she triumphed. "So I can't be scared now any more than the rest of the wild adventurers."

"Then you were scared?"

"Oh, here she is! Mrs. Locke! This is 'the sort o' watchman' I was telling you about."

In the act of holding out her hand, the woman's delicate face took on that marble look that once or twice Hildegarde had seen there. And the hand dropped before it reached Cheviot's.

Hildegarde looked from one to the other. "Why, what is it?"

"We have met before," said Mrs. Locke.

"When was that?"

"On the Seattle wharf."

"Oh, I did n't remember."

"I do. You are the man who nearly broke my arm."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. LOCKE had gone below and left them staring at one another.

"I have n't the smallest recollection of the woman."

She clutched at hope. "You could n't have been the one."

"*She* does n't seem to have much doubt about it."

"But you did n't—I 'm sure you did n't."

"I certainly did push my way about in that crowd."

"So did everybody."

"I 'm afraid it stands to reason a man does that kind of thing more effectually than a woman. Your Mrs. What 's-her-name may be right."

"Oh, Louis!"

"If she is, I 'm sorry."

"You simply *could n't* have—"

"Well, I don't know. I remember perfectly, I was frantic at not finding you."

Ashamed of the warmth his words brought welling up about her heart— "And you did n't think much of the women you did find. Yes, I remember what you said about the women who go on this sort of journey. But you 're wrong, you see. I know them now."

He made no answer. Just stood there, hands in pockets, arctic cap rolled back, so that it sat turban-like on

the crown of his head; the perplexity in the face giving way to a somewhat dogged good-temper that declined to be ruffled by the incident.

"Some of the women are just as—are more deserving of being treated well than I am."

"Oh, I dare say some of them are all right." He leaned against the railing, his square chin lifted, and he studied the man in the crow's-nest—but he went on saying in that cool way, "I 'm not denying that I would have broken any number of bones rather than not get to you in time to save you from coming to harm."

"Oh, *don't* say it! That 's exactly what Mrs. Locke thinks."

"Oh, Mrs. Locke!"—he moved his shoulders impatiently—"I 'm sorry if she got hurt. But in my opinion neither of you ought to have been there. Don't think my view about that is altered by your having come off scot free so far. You see somebody did suffer."

"Mrs. Locke."

"It 's just a chance it was n't you."

"Don't you see that it would n't be a chance if men treated all women as well as you 'd have treated me?"

"Men would have to feel about all women as I feel about you before that could come about, and that would n't even be desirable. It certainly is n't practical politics."

"Oh, I wish I were clever and could argue. I know there are things to say only I don't see how to put them."

"There 's this to say"—he stood up, a little impatiently—"I 've never posed as a passive individual. If I see things in my way I"—he made an expressive little

gesture—"I set them aside. If I hurt Mrs. Locke in setting her aside, I 'm sorry. But women have no business being in the way at such times."

"I am glad to think you are n't in your heart taking it as lightly as you pretend."

But the incident rather spoilt things. Instead of being able to yield unreservedly to the comfort, yes, the joy of his being there, a counter influence was at work. A watchfulness, critical, even painful. Not so much of Cheviot as of herself. *Was* she the kind of girl Mrs. Locke had meant?—the kind who said, "I 'm all right. What does it matter about other women." Something in her soul revolted at the charge. In other moods she was conscious only of a blind rebellion against this evil trick fate had played her—perversely thrusting into the foreground a thing so little representative of the man. Offering this, forsooth, as a symbol of all that lay behind. A lying symbol. He was n't like that. *Was* he? He had been "frantic" about her. Ah, the subtle danger of that solace, feeding self-love, divorcing her from her less fortunate sisters.

Few people minded the lowering weather the next day, since it brought a sight of land. Yet one had need to be at sea for a week and a half to find comfort in this vision of a dim gray rock rising out of a gray sea to starboard; or on the port side, a range of snow-flecked hills, with clouds hanging low over the crater of an extint volcano. How bleak the world up here in the Aleutians! Then suddenly, for Hildegarde, the chill vision warmed and glowed. "This is the kind of thing John Galbraith is looking at on the other side of the globe!"

To every one's huge satisfaction the *Los Angeles,* skirting Ounalaska, showed no sign of pausing. Instead of turning off toward Dutch Harbor to learn if the ice had yielded up yonder and the way was clear, boldly the ship took the short cut through Unimak Pass into the Bering Sea. What splendid time they were making under the convoy of this best of all captains! People went about boasting, "Nome by Sunday!"

"We 'll make the record trip!"

"—Make the big fortunes!"

"We 'll beat creation!"

"Splendid fellow, our captain!"

Never such luck before in this bedeviled course.

Toward three o'clock the next morning Hildegarde was waked by the noise of hurrying feet above her head and a great hubbub in the saloon.

"Mrs. Locke?" Her berth was empty.

In the narrow cabin two half-dressed women were agitatedly hunting their belongings, while the dressmaker, Miss Tillie Jump, screamed through the door to know if there was any danger.

"What 's happened?" asked Hildegarde, tumbling down out of her berth.

"We are in the ice."

"Masses all round us high as the ship."

Certainly Mrs. Locke had vanished. "I 'm very calm," said Miss Mar to herself, with a certain admiring surprise. And then her self-esteem fell from her with the realization that in the back of her head she knew there could not possibly be any immediate danger, or Cheviot would have made some sign. All the same, her tranquillity did not prevent her from picturing a

shipwreck, in which the clearest impression was that of Cheviot saving Mrs. Locke's life at risk of his own. The lady's heartfelt acknowledgments and tableau.

On deck, in the gray milky light, a different picture. No Cheviot and no discernible danger. Plenty of broken, moving ice, but nothing like the towering bergs of saloon rumor. Going forward at low pressure the *Los Angeles* was picking her way among the water-worn shapes that stood dazzling white, each on a pale green base, submerged yet partly visible. Strange sculpture of the sea, that, like a Rodin statue, gained meaning as you gazed. This rough-hewn mass was a crouching polar bear; that a saurian, antediluvian, vast. Some of the ice-cakes, flat, featureless, were mere lonely white rafts drifting from nowhere, bound nowhere; others manned by dwarf snowmen, misshapen, spectral.

Though so unlike report, there was something here expected, hauntingly familiar, like a single surviving impression out of a vanished life. From a long, long distance O'Gorman's voice recalled her as he came down the deck with Mrs. Locke. "What do you think of this for a change?"

Hildegarde was still looking round for Cheviot, as she answered, "It 's all much flatter and less tremendous than I expected."

"Three fourths of the ice is under water. I 'm afraid you 'll find it quite tremendous enough."

Here at last was Louis! "What 's going to happen?" Hildegarde hailed him.

He only pulled off his cap for her benefit. It was to O'Gorman he said, half aside, "We 'll have to get out of this."

While the two men stood there looking gravely out, the ship put her nose into the ice-pack, shivered, and drew back.

"What 's happening?"

"They 're reversing engines."

Hildegarde had put her question with a dawning sense of obscurer energies here at work than she had apprehended, and with that the thought of Galbraith took on a sudden something like its old ineluctable hold on her imagination. These the forces that had fashioned life for him. Yes, and for others, too.

The whole of that raw morning she haunted the upper deck, for the most part alone. If Mrs. Locke avoided her, it would seem that Cheviot was inclined to do the same. He had struck up a friendship with O'Gorman. They walked about or sat together in the smoking-room. The feeling of tension that pervaded the *Los Angeles* was manifest even in the Kangaroo Court. No livelier precinct hitherto on the *Los Angeles* than this part of the fo'c'sle, where, from the eminence of the judge's bench (a great coil of rope), Mr. Gedge imposed upon his much-diverted public a parody of those forms of legal procedure learned in his experience as a shorthand reporter of "cases," or, as he called himself, a court stenographer. Gedge modeled his style upon those administrators of justice who think because a man has disobeyed one law, his fellow-creatures may with respect to him (or rather without "respect") break all rules governing human intercourse. With the aid of unlimited audacity and a ready tongue, Mr. Matthew Gedge made things lively within the precincts of the Kangaroo Court. And with impunity, for an unwritten law or-

dains that no one, however great a personage, shall dare to defy the authority of the mock court, or can safely set aside its judgments. Woe betide any one who seriously persists in so unpopular a course. Whatever the case being tried, no bystander, no unwary passer even, but goes in peril of being summoned. If he know himself unable to beat Gedge at the sharp word game, it behooves the witness to bear himself meekly. If he thinks to flee, let him expect to hear Gedge roar with grim zest, "Constable! Do your duty. Arrest that man!" and sometimes half way to cover the offender is caught and haled back amid a general hilarity, to find himself, however confused, speechless or unwilling, clapped into the witness-box (a big iron boiler) and kept stewing there while he meets as best he may a fire of merciless questions and the bubbling merriment of the deck.

But to-day the sittings of the Court were suspended. The loungers who came to Gedge for diversion or enlightenment, got only a grumbled, "I pass!" or "Guess we 're euchred!" And even such popularity as Gedge's was threatened with eclipse for putting into words the silent misgivings of all men. The very sky looked evil. The ragged gray-brown clouds had been racing across the heavens like tatterdemalions hearing of mischief afoot and eager for a share. Now they were massed there in the southwest, a dirty, featureless mob, in which the ineffectual units were lost and the whole fused into a vast somber-hued menace.

The faithful Blumpitty sought out Miss Mar. "No—o," he drawled, rolling his eye among the fantastic ice shapes. "No—o, it don't look good to me, this don't." But Blumpitty had news. "That feller who discovered

—yes. And wus dyin' as hard as he could last fall. Well, he 's alive yet."

"How do you know?"

"Joslin says so. He had a letter at Seattle from a man who 'd come down to Nome from Polaris over the ice at Christmas. Not that it matters much. The sick feller don't seem to have let on to them others. Anyways, they 's good and plenty in the Mother Lode. What I don't see is how he managed it."

"Managed what?"

"To hang on. If ever I see death in a man's face! But I always said they wus n't like anything I ever seen before."

"What was n't?"

"*Them eyes.*"

"Near Nome, is it—the place where he—"

"Oh, no, a good ways north."

"Heavens, north even of Nome?"

"Yes, it 's the farthest north camp they is. Think o' him hangin' on all through the winter. In that place!" Blumpitty's pale gaze sought vainly for enlightenment among the moving ice masses.

"People do get through in worse places than that," said his companion.

"They ain't no worse places than Polaris."

"Yes, there 's Franz Josef Land."

"Never heard o' that camp."

"I wish *I* were going as far as Polaris."

"Why, come right along."

She laughed. "I only wish I could. I 'd like to know a man who 'd lived in the farthest north camp of all—the farthest on our side. What 's that?"

"Where?"

"Out there." She pointed to a ghostly something, faint as smoke against the high light of the ice rim on the far horizon.

Blumpitty stared. "Reckon it 's a cloud. "They 's two more! And another. No, by gum, it 's ships!"

And ships they were, five of them, the first seen since leaving Vancouver!—spectacle to stir the chilled blood of watchers on the *Los Angeles.* For these dreamlike apparitions were vessels such as theirs, threatened like them with ice-pack and with storm. A detachment of the Nome fleet! None came any nearer, except the *Ohio* and the little *Charles Nelson.* They spoke and passed, the *Ohio* speedily to vanish; *Charles Nelson* to tack about, hunting an outlet, and then, discouraged, turn south as the bigger *Los Angeles* pushed valiantly through the ice to the North. "Turn back! No use!" *Charles Nelson* warned, and then, quicker than ever you saw in your life, the fog swooped down and wiped everything off the ocean except the nearer ice. The *Los Angeles* turned and tacked about to the tune of the foghorn, trying to find a way through the heavier floe, only to be headed off by bigger masses looming through the haze, majestic slow-sailing ice-ships, some like white gondolas, some like sturdy, low-built castles set fantastically on a field of fleece, for the exposed parts of the berg had rotted in the sun, and in the wind been rippled, so that a nearer sight showed the surfaces honeycombed, disintegrate. And again to Hildegarde Mar came that sense of its all being familiar, as though she had been here before. So she had, in spirit. With a thrilling sense of recognition she discovered the original of more than one picture

in that book of Galbraith's that she and Bella had pored over in their school-days.

When, early in the afternoon, the fog lifted a little, a message came from the captain inviting Miss Mar to the bridge that she might have a better view. By the time she had obeyed the summons the wind had risen. The captain was looking through his glass, and Mrs. Locke was at his side. He left both visitors with harassed face and called down to Cheviot walking below with O'Gorman. And now Louis stood beside the captain on the bridge, looking to the northeast, and talking in an undertone.

"What does he know," said Mrs. Locke, referring to Cheviot for the first time, "about navigation?"

"Nothing, I should think," said Hildegarde serenely, yet with that stirring of pride that visits a woman when the man she is interested in is called to counsel. "You see Louis has been up here before, and so few people have."

"Oh!" Mrs. Locke turned indifferently away and looked out over the white-patched water. The girl felt anew and keenly the embarrassment that had come of the confrontation of these two. Impossible for her to think it did n't matter. No vulgarity of soul helped her to meet the issue with, "Mrs. Locke 's 'nobody,'—a little book-keeping woman we shall never see again!" She could not even, as a feebler nature would, simply ignore the incident of the day before, accepting for Louis Mrs. Locke's evil opinion, accepting for Mrs. Locke his professed regret but real indifference, verging on dislike.

"Of course," Hildegarde drew closer, "I 've thought

a great deal about what happened yesterday—I mean what happened on the wharf."

"Oh, put it out of your head."

"It 's hardly been out of my head a minute, except the two hours I slept this morning."

"I ought to have held my tongue."

"I 'm glad you did n't. Because now I know something more than that he hurt you."

"What do you know?"

"How much he can hurt *me*," was on her tongue, but the only answer she made was, "I must n't let you think that I 'm going to turn a cold shoulder on my friend because—"

"Oh, no." It was said not scornfully—just accepting it.

"I think a month ago I would either not have believed it or I would have explained it all away to myself. I 'd have said he did n't know what he was doing. He—he was— Oh, there are a dozen excuses I might have made for him."

"Yes, dozens."

"But now I don't make one. I say, 'Yes, he did it, and he does n't even realize how terrible it was.' "

Mrs. Locke glanced at her curiously. "It 's true a good deal has to happen before men and women can treat each other fairly."

Hildegarde nodded. "I 'm beginning to see that. Louis has n't begun—not yet. But about other things he 's always been the one who 's helped and taught me. Done it for lots of other people, too, of course," she hastened to add. "I 'd never once thought of him as a person I could help."

"And now—"

"Now—" Her grave look went as far as that of the blind who seem to descry Truth riding on the viewless air, or sitting on the round world's uttermost rim. Certainly Hildegarde had been given such extension of vision in these hours that plainly enough she saw that it was not till a cloud settled on Cheviot's fame that she knew how much its fairness meant to her. Acceptance of that had brought her acquainted with yet another new aspect of experience. Here was a man that had everybody and everything to recommend him—*up to yesterday*. Since yesterday she knew not only that his nature and his outlook were on one side defective, she had glimpses of a faith that, precisely because of this, he had a need of her beyond the one he had been used to urge. A light shone in the thought that there was something she could do for him that perhaps no other creature could. A perception this of infinite significance to such as Hildegarde Mar, belonging as she did to the bigger of the two camps into which womankind are naturally divided. For, *pace* the satirists, those of her sex who make most stir in the world and cause most commotion in the hearts of men—those daughters of the horse leech, whose unappeased hunger cries ever "More, more! Give! and give again!" they are in the minority. To the larger, if less striking army, those whose primal passion is to give—of them was Hildegarde.

"It looks as if—for all Louis is so wonderfully clear-headed and I 'm so—the other way, there are some things I can see plainer than he. But it seems to me that 's only a reason for"—her voice dropped a little—"for—"

"Yes," said Mrs. Locke.

Hildegarde flushed faintly. "For trying, I don't mean by preaching, but trying to help him to see—well, some of the things you 've given me an inkling of." She laid her hand gently on the older woman's. Mrs. Locke's fingers closed round the girl's, but she said nothing. "So, though he nearly broke your arm, you will have done him a service."

The white face smiled its enigmatic little smile. But presently, "I 'm glad I know you," she said.

"Are you? Then let 's be friends?"

As though some tangible barrier had been beaten down they went nearer the two men. The captain was ending, "—and if the ice closes in behind us we 'll be trapped."

"Oh, is that all!" said Cheviot, glancing toward Hildegarde.

"No, it is n't all. We 'd be carried wherever the floe goes—and that 's not Nome." Gillies lowered the glass, and his strained-looking eyes fell on the two he had forgotten. "Sorry, ladies, you must go below."

Not only rather snubbed, but feeling now the gravity of affairs, Hildegarde and her companion departed with some precipitation, while the captain's hoarse shout rang out in an indistinguishable order to some invisible officer.

A few minutes later, standing on bales of merchandise for'ard on the upper deck, they watched the altering of the course and the race for that single opening, narrow and ever narrower in the close-packed ice. It was exciting enough, for they got out just in time. Thirty-four hours afterward the *Los Angeles* was still beating about

on the edge of the pack, looking for another break in the long white line.

The spirits of the passengers steadily sank. To their jealous imagining all those phantom ships, and the score unseen, were now forging ahead. Only the *Los Angeles* besieged the ice in vain. Men stood in knots discussing the captain's mistakes and airing their own knowledge. They had expected this state of things if he persisted in keeping so far to the east. Hour by hour Gillies's credit fell.

The only break in the dead monotony of the afternoon was suggested in the general invitation to come for'ard and hear Gedge roast the captain. It went ill that day with any witness in Gillies's favor.

In the middle of dinner people looked up from their plates and said: "What 's that?"

The bean-feaster was the first to find his tongue. "By ——," he said, "we 've stopped!" The passengers dropped their knives and forks and rushed on deck. The bean-feaster was right. In trying to get round the eastern shoulder of the floe, the *Los Angeles* had run aground in Norton Sound, thirty miles from the mainland. The engines were reversed, and the water round the propeller was set boiling. The ship never budged. The deck resounded to the uproar of many tongues. To waste thirty-six hours feeling her way round the floe was bad enough, but to be "hung up on a sand-bar," a hundred and fifty miles from Nome, with a wicked-looking ice-pack bearing down on you from the west—! And here comes the *Charles Nelson* once more, very perky this time, profiting by the object lesson and steering clear of the bar. The *Los Angeles* humbled her

pride to ask for a line. "Can't get near enough," the word came back. "I 'm in three fathom now!" and away *Charles Nelson* goes, leaving the big steamer to her fate.

"What 's that feller calls himself a captain, what 's he goin' to *do?*" demanded Mr. Gedge of his satellites. "'Wait for the tide!' Yah! He 's got the most high-spirited idears of any man I ever— 'Wait!' After wastin' two days and nights a'ready! 'Wait!' While the other fellers are knockin' the bottom out o' Nome!"

This was a harassing thought, but the captain still had his apologists, even in the Kangaroo Court. It was O'Gorman's friend with the fiery beard who dared to point out, "Mr. Gedge told us on Friday and Saturday the captain was 'incompetent and foolhardy.' On Sunday and Monday he 's 'over-cautious and damnably slow.' To-night Mr. Gedge tells us—"

"To-night," that gentleman shouted, "I 'm tellin' you still more about this —— captain. Did they or did they not say to us in Seattle that Gillies was a first-rate seaman?"

"Yes, and so he is!"

"Did they or did they not tell us he knew his job?"

"Right! Knows this ship as you know the way to your mouth."

"Yah! Knows what she can do on the Japan route. But this, gentlemen and ladies, ain't the road to Manila. And do you know what? This here is Captain Gillies's first trip to Alaska!" Gedge brought it out with a sledge-hammer effect. The audience felt they were expected to be dumfounded. They complied.

But a voice was heard: "It 's most people's first trip to Alaska."

"I tell you," said Gedge, judicially, "he knows as little about these northern seas as that boy there with the banjer."

"This self-appointed judge," Cheviot's voice rose steadily above the growing murmur, "has n't heard apparently that *nobody* knows these waters."

"Would you mind repeatin' that, sir?"

"Not at all. In the first place, the Bering is a practically uncharted sea. That may be a disgrace to our Coast Survey, but it 's hardly the captain's fault."

Gedge looked stumped for a moment. If this were true it would n't do for him not to know it.

Cheviot was making good the diversion in the captain's favor, when Gedge interrupted: "Does the captain's friend pretend to say that the whalers and sealers and fellers who 've been up here before gold was thought of—that none o' *them* don't know enough to keep off a damned sand-bank?" Looking his wiliest: "Now, if we had one o' them sort here—" Then, with a highly effective coup: "Ladies and gentlemen, we got him!"

"Here on this ship?"

"Right here on board the *Los Angeles!*"

"Where? Who, who? Name?" Everybody but Cheviot and a few women were shouting themselves hoarse.

"What y' got to say to that, Mr. —— You, there, with the arctic cap and the tender heart fur captains?"

"I 've got this to say. That even the men who sailed

along here last fall, don't know Norton Sound this summer."

"*Wot?*"

"Can't know it."

"And why not?"

"For the good reason that new sand-bars are formed up here every spring. Not a ship that sails for any port on the northwest coast but goes on what 's practically an exploring expedition. That 's our true danger. The captain's no less than ours."

"Oh, yes, we all know you 're in with his nibs, but what my friends don't know is that Billings & Co. sent a pilot aboard this ship."

"Why, then," roared half-a-dozen voices, "why ain't he pilotin'!"

"Why?" Mr. Gedge shouted above the din. "*I* can tell—" His sentence was jerked to an abrupt close. "What in hell 's up?"

Two or three women had uttered little shrieks, and, "What was that?" people asked one another. Men turned and looked in each other's faces. "What *was* it?"

The sudden jar and vibration of the ship lent added force to Mr. Gedge's charge. "The reason the pilot ain't pilotin' is because the captain ordered him off the bridge the second day out."

"Now I know what it means when the papers say, 'Sensation in the court'!" a little Canadian hospital nurse whispered to Mrs. Locke. But in another second she was clinging to that lady and her eyes were scared and wide; for, as if under the assault of a battering-ram, the *Los Angeles* was shaking from stem to stern.

Hildegarde felt a warm hand laid on her two, tight-clasped and cold. Cheviot had put an arm through the outer fringe of the group where she and Mrs. Locke were standing. "Come for'ard," he said.

"Was that the ice?" Mrs. Locke whispered, allowing herself to be drawn along.

All the rest of the people stood hushed for a moment as if stunned by the concussion. The three who alone in those first instants seemed to retain power of movement quietly made their way out of the throng, while every ear was filled with the horrible secondary sounds of that mighty impact—a slow grinding, a horrible gritting, as of granite jaws reducing the bones of prey to powder.

"I want you to stay here till I come back." Cheviot left the two women under the bridge. As Hildegarde listened with beating heart to the sound of the ice against the ship, she said to herself: "These are moments Jack Galbraith has known. After to-night I shall understand better. I shall be closer to a part of his life than Bella ever will." Every sense was set to note the change that in the last few minutes had come over the spirit of the ship. No wild commotion, a hush rather. But a thing of eery significance. No more shrill harangues in the Kangaroo Court. No dancing on the upper deck. No *tink-a-tink* of banjo in the steerage. Men gathering in groups, talking for the most part quite quietly, but agreed that "the old sea tramp" would n't stand much of this kind of thing. With a single mind the women, as soon as they had pulled themselves together, hastened down below.

"I think I 'll go down, too, and see—" Hildegarde began. "I won't be two minutes."

"Where are you going?"

"To the cabin. Do you want anything brought up?"

"No."

The girl was longer than two minutes, but she was no less surprised when, upon her reappearance with a small hand-bag, she found Cheviot talking to Mrs. Locke. "The current is carrying the ice out all right. Probably the only danger is the passengers making fools of themselves. But if they 'll only go quietly to bed—"

"They won't," said Mrs. Locke. The two discussed this quite in the tone of being allies. "Nobody will go to bed to-night," she assured him.

"What do they want to do?" he demanded.

"Sit up till one in the morning," Mrs. Locke answered, "and see the tide float us off the bar."

"Well, the women at all events"—Cheviot looked about with an air of relief—"the women have gone to bed already."

"No, indeed," said Hildegarde. "They 're tumbling over one another down in the saloon, in and out of the state-rooms collecting their things. Some are saying their prayers, and some—"

"Do you sing?" Cheviot demanded.

"I?" Mrs. Locke stared. "No."

"Who does?" he appealed to Hildegarde.

"I don't know."

"Yes, I heard a woman yesterday—"

"Oh, that awful Miss Pinckney, you know, with the draggled feathers!"

"Well, go and find her and get her to sing now."

"*Sing?*"

"Yes, sing. It may make just all the difference." Cheviot was in the act of bolting back to the captain.

"She can't sing." Hildegarde followed him a step.

He misunderstood it for an untimely musical criticism. "Then let her make a noise of some sort."

"Oh, she 's doing that—screaming with hysterics down in the saloon." Cheviot flashed back to say confidentially, not to Hildegarde, but to Mrs. Locke: "Go and see if you can't get up a concert." With which cool and apparently crazy suggestion he vanished.

Twenty minutes later a woman, wearing diamond earrings and a sealskin jacket, paused in her flight up the companionway and leaned an instant, panting, against the music-room door. Now she was lifting her head with a slow incredulity, as an unsteady voice near by began to quaver out a rag-time ballad, highly offensive to sensitive ears, but a tune familiar and to many on the ship most dear. The woman peered round the half-open door, staring from one to the other of those callous creatures within, making merry on the brink of destruction—Miss Mar at the piano, and at her side the draggled Miss Pinckney. Ah, no, that red-eyed woman was n't callous. She sang the inane words with lips that trembled. Now she was breaking down.

"No, no. Go on," Miss Mar insisted. "Think of the others."

"They 'll never listen. Everybody 's too—too—"

"Well, let 's see. Now!" and very ineffectually Hildegarde took up the second verse. Miss Pinckney plucked the strain away as two men looked in. There was nothing especial to take them up or down. They stood near the woman with the diamond ear-rings, hardly

knowing that they listened. In that first twenty minutes, every time the ice struck the ship, Miss Pinckney would hesitate and her voice would fly off the scale in a faint scream.

"Oh, *please!* That 's enough to scare anybody!" and Hildegarde played doggedly on. "Now, let 's try again!" It was, however, as if not Miss Mar's admonishing, but the rude insistence of the tune dragged Miss Pinckney along, pulling her out of the pit of her fears and landing her "Down along the Bowery," or "In Gay Paree," or some place equally remote from the sand-bar in the Bering Sea.

Mrs. Locke, with the Blumpittys and a brace of doctors in tow, appeared in the act of descending for a muster of "the company." Cheviot came flying down behind them, two steps at a time. He was about to turn in at the music-room, when a woman pushed past him, showing a panic-stricken face above the sleeping child that she carried clutched tight against her breast. A sudden jar made the sleeper lift a cropped head and look about with wide eyes.

"Hello!" said Cheviot reassuringly, in a cheerful and commonplace voice. "This is a passenger I have n't seen before. Are n't you rather too big, sir, to be carried?"

—"has n't been well!" muttered the woman, taking breath to recommence the ascent.

"Look here, where are you going?" And without waiting to know, "Some of us can carry—" He was taking the burden out of the thin arms.

"No," remonstrated the woman, as Cheviot turned in at the music-room, "we must go up to father."

"I 'll send him down to you."

"No, no. We 've got to go up and—be ready."

"Ready for what?" He fixed upon the woman a pair of faith-inspiring eyes so unclouded that she stared.

"Don't you want to listen to the singing?" Cheviot bent smiling to the little person who lay quite content in his arms, studying the man's face with the solemn absorption of childhood.

Not many there besides him, but because Cheviot had come in the concert had begun. Others besides Hildegarde felt this quickening of life in any room he entered. Miss Pinckney remembered she had the music of a "reel pretty song" out of the "Belle of New York." She 'd go and get it.

"Do you hear that?" Cheviot said, depositing the child on one of the rickety chairs. "You 've just come in time," and he stood a moment talking to the mother. The child sat askew, with its father's great waterproof cape hitched up on one side and trailing on the other. When the little figure made the slightest movement the lop-sided chair wobbled and threatened collapse. Instantly the child desisted and became nervously engrossed in the problem of a nice equilibrium. The little face took on a look of tense uneasiness. It was plain that courage was lacking so much as to pull a good deep breath lest it draw ruin down. Cheviot, still talking with the mother, turned to take in his the small child hand that clutched the chair. Was it the look of heavy responsibility in the small face, or was it another onslaught of ice against the ship that made him say, "Music 's soon going to begin, little—what 's your name?"

The child opened thin lips and emitted a careful sound.

"Joseph? Well, I hope you 'll like the concert, Joseph." That was too much for the occupant of the *siege perilous.* There was a howl above the mother's reproachful correction. "Her name 's Josephine,"—a general giving way to overstrain, and chair and child were in ruins on the floor.

Miss Mar, glancing over her shoulder, shaking with hysterical laughter, saw that Louis, gathering up the sobbing Josephine, bit his lip as though in mere dismay, forbearing to wound the luckless one by laughing at her discomfiture.

"Yes, that 's like him, too," Hildegarde said to herself, as one welcoming one more of a cloud of witnesses. She fell upon the piano with redoubled vigor. Loud and fast she hammered out the wildest jig she could remember. Miss Pinckney coming back, music in hand, stopped with a scream. Bang! Bang! Grit! Grind! went the ice. Josephine shrieked without intermission till Cheviot, having found a chair with more than three legs, anchored her securely in that haven. With the first words of Miss Pinckney's song, Cheviot was flying back to the deck.

Bang! Grit! Grind! Was she awake, Hildegarde asked herself, or was this fetid room and were these harsh, assailing sounds a form of nightmare? Steadily she played on. Cheviot looked in again, but it was to Mrs. Locke he whispered: "We must break up the Kangaroo Court. Musical talent going to waste there." She followed him out. In passing Hildegarde he had bent his head. "Keep it up," he said. "Whatever you do, don't stop." She reflected a little enviously that

she could be quite as happy running about the deck with Louis as pinned to the moth-eaten music-stool, grinding out cheap airs. Then she found herself smiling. Not the least strange part of this strange evening that Louis should be sending Mrs. Locke on errands, and that Mrs. Locke should be going. The room was filling. Upon the lady's reappearance with the banjo boy and the cross-eyed flute-player, the concert was in full swing. Now Mrs. Locke was telling Hildegarde to play the "Battle Hymn," and presently several of the men were helping Miss Pinckney to send John Brown's soul marching on. Oh, for a little air! Surely there was n't room for any more people in this overcrowded space. But still they came. It was curious to watch the new faces at the door peering over the shoulders of those who stood about the piano. Little by little you could see the strain going out of the tense features. Not that their anxieties vanished, but they were softened, humanized through the humble agency of a ramshackle piano and an untrained voice in a song. Even the steps, from the very top to the bottom of the companionway, were crowded now. That fact of itself made for quiescence on the decks. People could no longer run freely up or down. While they paused and wormed their way, they were laid hold of by their ears. The little room was packed to suffocation. Deserted by his audience, even Gedge came down to see what was up. Thicker and more stifling grew the air. In a pause between songs a scrap of conversation floated over Hildegarde's shoulder, "Lucky there 's no wind."

"God, yes! If there was wind—"

"Shut up!"

"What then, if there was wind—?" a third insisted, barely audible.

"Oh, *then*, we 'd get off the bar." Clear enough to one of those for whose weaker sake the truth was veiled —clear enough what the ironic comfort meant. If behind the ice were wind as well as current, the ship would n't live an hour. Steadily the girl played on. Was n't the onslaught of the ice heavier that last time? Was the wind rising then? Yes, surely, surely, the wind had risen. Well, one must play the louder. But her tranced eyes turned now right, now left. Some faces clearer than others in the haze. Gedge, with his pasty visage bleached to chalk, and of his cheap but heady eloquence never a word. Others here that Hildegarde had seen night after night, gambling, drinking, quarreling—and now . . . !

These rude fellow-creatures, little admirable as they might show themselves in happier hours, wore something very like dignity to-night. How still they were! It did not escape Hildegarde that all these many pairs of eyes were either lowered or fixed on space, as if each one forebore to read in his fellow's face confirmation of his own grim knowledge. Each avoiding the other's eyes, they stood there listening to those sounds the puny piano was ineffectual to drown—the crash of impact and the yet more horrible crunching, vicious and prolonged, as though man's arch-enemy of the deep, after battering vainly for admission, would gnaw his admission to this strange concert on the ice-beleaguered bar. While the nerves of the people still vibrated under the bombardment, some one started "Nearer, my God, to Thee." Strangest of all on that strange evening was the revela-

tion that in this particular company hardly one but seemed to know the hymn, and few that were not singing it with abandon to the thunderous bass of the ice. Whatever your own thoughts might be, you read in more than one of these faces that of a certainty God was "nearer" this night than He had often been before. At the beginning of the last verse, the loudest crash of all, as if a hundred tons of iron had been hurled at the *Los Angeles*. The people, led by one unfaltering voice, kept on singing. Only Hildegarde's flying fingers stumbled as the ship shrank and cowered under the blow. Had it ended like this for Galbraith, too? Would he and she meet down there in the kind sea caves?

Cheviot's face looked in through the haze. Of course she had known he would come for her at the last. When those firm lips opened she would hear him saying: "Stop your playing. We 've done what we could—you down here, I on deck. Let us go now and meet the end." Oh, it was well that he was here! Through the haze his face swam nearer, and what he was really saying was: "Good girl! If only you can keep it up a little longer!" And with that the face grew dim.

"A little longer!" Faintness, like sleep, stole over the good girl. As a peculiar throbbing went through the ship, Hildegarde felt the hulk of the *Los Angeles* open, and knew vaguely that she was falling.

When she opened her eyes Louis was lifting her up. She was not clinging to a berg, nor even sitting on a cake of ice. Still in the noisome little room, and still that throbbing was shaking the ship. The people who had been so quiet were pushing, jostling, shouting, frantic to get— Where? To the boats, of course! All ex-

"Nearer, my God, to Thee"

cept Louis and Mrs. Locke. Noble souls, they were ready to stay and die with Hildegarde Mar! She must exert herself.

"Now I can go."

"There 's no hurry," says Cheviot.

"Oh, yes, come. We must try—we, too."

"Try what?"

"Why, to—to save ourselves."

He laughed. "Poor girl, do you feel dreadfully shipwrecked?"

"What, then, are they all running for?" She looked round bewildered.

"The engines have started. Tide 's nearly flood. Can you walk? That 's right." They helped her to the deck. Long after midnight—and the world so bright! Oh, the blessing of the pure, cold air! While she breathed it in, O'Gorman stopped to whisper in Cheviot's ear: "By George, you 've saved a panic!"

"No," says Cheviot, "it was n't my concert."

CHAPTER XXI

IN those last hours the great body of the floe had swung away to westward. It was the very rear-guard of the outgoing ice that had assisted at the concert. By this unfailing daylight you could see, an hour after midnight, the shining stretch of smooth water that lay between the *Los Angeles* and the invisible mainland. People hung over the ship's side to watch the flood-tide swirl and churn under the propeller, while the "old sea tramp," mustering every pound of energy, struggled to get free. Yes, it was exciting enough, but to the tall girl bending her hatless head over the railing at Cheviot's side, not half as exciting as certain discoveries she was making without the aid of steam. Not alone in Norton Sound was the tide at flood. She drew closer to her companion with a mingled joy and shyness. Just that little nearer drawing, how strange that it should be the stuff of which so great happiness is made! Was he feeling it, too? Was he realizing? Or was all his soul down there in the turgid water foaming under the propeller's beat. She remembered enviously how Louis's little nephew would pat you on the arm if you grew abstracted, and remind you: "I 'm here." She longed to do the same. She even did it in a less direct fashion with the words: "I should think, by the feel of the air, there must be more icebergs on their way down."

"Hard work," he said, all his sympathies with the propeller.

"Brrr!" remarked Hildegarde.

"Nearly as much mud as water," he went on, with equal irrelevance.

"It certainly *is* a great deal colder," she persisted, as though he had denied that fact.

"Less than two fathoms at low tide—"

"Brrr! Brrr!"

Ah, that had brought him back. From the overcoat he was wearing he hurriedly unbuttoned the tweed cape, and when he got it off put it round Hildegarde's shoulders.

"Are you sure you won't miss it?" she asked.

"It won't keep you warm if it is n't buttoned." With a droll preoccupied air and a pursed lip, less like a lover paying graceful attentions to his lady than like a clumsy nurse with a small child to look after, Cheviot laboriously buttoned up the cape. Only, a nurse, however little skilled, would not have begun at the bottom, nor, having at last buttoned her way to the top, would she have so nearly buttoned in her charge's chin. Hildegarde laughed, and considering she 'd been so short a time in the cape, grew miraculously warm. To avoid looking at Cheviot she looked down to see how the propeller might be getting on.

"You must be still just half a minute, you know," he admonished her, and they found themselves laughing into each other's eyes.

"I ought to go and get my own things," she said. "Brrr!"

He took off his arctic cap and dropped it on the blonde head. "*Now* will you be good!" he said.

They seemed to be the only people on the *Los Angeles* to know a moment's intermission in the stark suspense of hanging over the ship's side waiting for the blessed moment that should see them, by aid of flood and steam, floated off the bar.

At last! the throbbing modified by a new motion. Slowly the ship swayed fore and aft with a faint seesawing effect. A great cheer, "She 's off!" was cut short by the excitement of watching how the boast was being made good. Ten seconds' breathless waiting for that final pull out of the mud-trap, while idle muscles grew taut as though to help the ship in her labor, and then slowly, unwillingly, relaxed. Despair fell upon the crowd as the *Los Angeles* grounded again more firmly than before. In vain her engines pulled and throbbed, breathing into the delicate dawn-flushed air inky bursts of smoke.

Some one called out, "She 's canted to starboard," and another described the dilemma as "a righteous judgment for the overloading."

"If we 're stuck here because there 's so many of us aboard, we can get off for the same reason." Gedge's "brilliant idear" was that the people should be massed for'ard, and then, upon a signal, should tear as hard as legs could carry them to the other end of the ship. The sudden shifting of "ballast" would work the keel free. The game was entered into with immense spirit. Any one who, from a balloon, could have looked down on the scampering horde would have taken the scene for one of frenetic lunacy. Whether by such an effect as Gedge anticipated, or by some other agency, just once the tall mast swayed like some strong-rooted pine in a passing

breeze. The people shrieked with triumph, and tore madly back again from stem to stern. But they and the engines and the foaming water might rage as they would. "The keel 's grown fast to the bottom of the ocean," Hildegarde whispered.

Louis turned and looked into the face that was so close to his own. "Never mind—" he began.

"I am never-minding." She smiled back into his grave eyes.

But he seemed to feel that, nevertheless, she must need reassuring. "We 'll get off all right *somehow.*"

"To-morrow?" she asked, quite without eagerness.

"I don't know about to-morrow." He looked past his companion at harassed, disappointed faces. "It 's a plain case for a little patience."

"Do I strike you as impatient?"

"You strike me as—" He seemed to pull himself up, and yet he allowed himself to say it slowly: "You were splendid to-night."

She glowed inwardly. "Louis!"

"Yes." They were leaning far over the railing again, shoulder to shoulder.

"Louis."

"Well. You got that far before. What comes next?"

"I let you say all that about my not needing you. But if you knew how I 've been blessing you for—for your forbearance with my stubbornness about coming—for your forgiveness—"

"Don't talk nonsense."

"You are far too good—to *me.*"

He seemed not to feel the prick of any point in her emphasis. "I can't have you talking of goodness as be-

tween you and me—it 's foolishness," he said lightly. Then as she opened her lips, "I forbid you even to think of it."

"I think of nothing else," she answered gently.

Instead of giving her proper credit for that, Louis sent a wandering eye over his shoulder. Actually, he was making an excuse of listening to that blatant Gedge bellowing about the "damnable delay."

She looked at Cheviot with a frank perplexity that before she knew it had gone over into longing. Is he going to decline to make the least little bit of love to me because I 'm away from home? Is that the "sort o' watchman" he 's going to be? Oh, *dear!*

"Do you know what time it is?" The watchman pulled out his watch.

"I don't care the very least in the world what time it is."

"That 's just what always happens when the sun shines all night. It 's very demoralizing."

Demoralizing! That after all those hours of strain in the foul atmosphere below, that she should be willing to stand here awhile in the crisp and radiant morning talking to him; talking more gratefully than ever she had done in her life—"demoralizing!" He was n't even now attending to her. "Why do you allow Gedge to bother you so? It is n't like you," she said. Still he wore that tantalizing air of listening to the orator on the rope coil. "What difference can it make to you anything a man like that may say?"

"It might make a difference to more than me—if he was n't looked after. I believe I 'll go and do it. Good-night, Good Girl!"

The couple of hours of chill sunshine after breakfast showed a waveless sea. Far off against the eastern horizon were single icebergs, that looked like the white tents pitched on the glassy surface of the sound.

To the passengers on the grounded ship the calm weather was only a goad to rage. The rest of the Nome fleet—*they* were profiting by open water and absence of head winds! But as for us of the *Los Angeles,* we 've left our families, sold our farms, risked all we have on earth for the pleasure of sitting on a sand-bank a hundred and fifty miles from the gold-fields!

From hour to hour the disaffection spread. Every one on board had a remedy for the disaster. Where it had been thought were miners, attorneys, doctors, politicians, it turned out they were navigators to a man.

No glimpse of Cheviot till an hour after breakfast. Even then only a nod and "Good-morning," as he went by deep in talk with the chief engineer. Toward ten o'clock a little wind sprang out of the northeast and brought down a thin veil of fog. The air took on a keener edge, yet no one left the deck or even seemed to feel the cold, for a rumor had run about the ship like fire over dry stubble: "The captain says we 'll never get off this —— bar till we unload."

"Unload! Unload what?"

Pat the answer: "First, the coal."

"Throw away *coal!*"

Such a counsel of despair struck grave enough on the ears of men who knew the fabulous sums paid in Nome for fuel. But not the coal, it was the little word "first" that presented the keenest barb to each man's consciousness. Just as though the immense sacrifice of the coal

were not fit and sufficient climax to the misadventure! "First!" What possible second? Why, after the coal, overboard with McKeown and Dingley and the rest of the heavy stuff!

"Just let the Cap'n lay a finger on my Dingley," warned a bystander, black as thunder.

"That 's what he 's figurin' on," Gedge assured the irate one. "And after the machinery"—people crowded aghast to hear—"if we ain't light enough by then, why, overboard with every darn thing we got!"

"If he tries throwin' out our stuff he 'll have a riot on his hands—that 's all!"

Things began to look black for the captain.

But if he were aware of the fact, it had no effect on his policy. Hardly ten minutes later Gedge was obliged to interrupt the indignation meeting by calling out to a couple of blue China boys, struggling to get some of the lighter baggage out of the hold: "Hi, you! Stop that, you pig-tailed heathen. That 's mine. Drop it, I say, or I 'll knock the stuffin' out o' you!"

The agitated Celestials would have abandoned their task, but for O'Gorman's: "Say! They 're only getting your stuff up into a safe place so they can reach the coal-bunkers. Here, put the gentleman's box over by mine."

In a couple of hours the deck was piled high with miscellaneous baggage, and a derrick, hurriedly rigged, was hauling up the heavier things out of the bowels of the ship. As they came swinging out of the darkness into the chill gray light, people recognized their belongings with an anxiety hardly allayed by the temporary stowage of their all upon the deck—too palpably a possible half-way station to the bottom of the sea.

Gedge's following was now so great as to be unwieldy. They blocked the narrow gangway, they settled like flies on the freight. He drew off a chosen few, and retired out of the bitter wind to the shelter of the smoke-stack to hold a private session.

"If that fellow had some education," said Governor Reinhart, "he 'd be helping to guide the ship of state at Washington."

"He seems likely to guide this ship into trouble enough," Cheviot answered crisply.

"What is he doing now?" Hildegarde asked.

"He 's—" Reinhart began and hesitated.

Under his breath O'Gorman finished the sentence. "Trying to incite a lot of fools to mutiny."

"What does he want them to do?"

"Put the captain in irons."

"What!"

"And turn the ship over to the pilot and first officer—that fellow coming off the bridge now."

Hildegarde followed Louis's eyes and saw they were fixed not on the dapper officer descending, but were on the square figure of the captain standing motionless on the bridge, looking down at the coolies busy as ants about the hold. But he looked, not as if he saw them. The hard face was red and angry. Hildegarde, with her genius for sympathy, divined something in it infinitely miserable, too. "How lonely the man looks," she said aside to Cheviot.

"You can't be at the head of things and not be lonely."

The words deepened her sense of commiseration. "You don't think he knows about Gedge's wild talk?"

"Oh, probably."

"I wish he could be reminded he has friends among us as well as enemies."

"I was just going up," Louis said.

"Do you think I might come? Just for a moment?"

"Well, if he fires you out you are n't to complain."

"Complain? No. But I shall still believe it 's a pity that men think whoever is to know the truth about a danger or a difficulty, it must n't be a woman. Don't you see it would be a gain to both sides that we should know?"

"Nonsense. It would scare most women and bore the rest. Besides, they 'd be in the way."

"If that 's so it 's only because they 've been kept so ignorant. Louis"—the voice dropped softly—"do you know what I 've been thinking about often and often?"

He waited a moment before he said: "Since we got into the ice?"

"Yes."

"I suppose I do." But he said it so stonily she stopped half-way up the companionway and looked back at him. "I 've been thinking I should never have known you if I had n't come on this journey."

"Oh, found me out, have you?"

Hearing Cheviot's short laugh, Gillies jerked his head angrily over his shoulder. Hildegarde hesitated at the top of the companionway. "It looks like a dreadful breach of discipline," she said, "but it is n't. You told me I might come again."

"In here, then," said Gillies gruffly, and took them to his room. He was shaking like one in an ague, but he seemed not so ill pleased to see some one from the world

below. He gave the girl a chair. "It 's all right," he said. "Only it 's no good for others to see you up here." He fell into the remaining seat with a heavy thud, and his bullet head hung forward. "Well?" he demanded, with a forced laugh, turning bloodshot eyes on Cheviot. Hildegarde saw plainer now what an unnatural color Gillies was. Did the shivering and the purple and scarlet stains mean a sickening for fever, or only a horrible anxiety and an all-night watch in the cold?

"I 'm afraid you did n't get much sleep," she began.

"Not for two nights now," he said, and then looking at Cheviot: "This 'll be all over the coast, from Nome to 'Frisco." As he spoke the hard face twitched.

"What will?" Cheviot answered. "That the floods have made a new bar in Norton Sound this spring?"

The captain uttered an inarticulate sound, something between a grunt and a groan. "First trip, too! Ship full of damned newspaper people. Land rats, starving for a story." He choked, and stood up stamping his cold feet, and while he did so, through the port he forced the sleep-defrauded eyes to reconnoiter the sharp, white outline of the distant icebergs.

"There are people on board who 'll get the story right," said Hildegarde.

"Oh, I don't care! Let 'em say what they like—if only the wind does n't bring the floe down on us again." Cheviot made a move as if to go. "The trouble is," said Gillies, "I 'm short of hands. However hard they keep at it those China boys can't shift five hundred tons of coal before the tide 's flood."

"Well, you 've got a lot of white men on board—"

"Yes," growled the captain, "and a lot of help I 'll get out of them."

"What I came up for"—Cheviot drew nearer—"was really to tell you there are men on board this ship who propose to stand by you."

Gillies, leaning against the locker, neither said nor looked a syllable of thanks. Never even took his bloodshot eyes off the ice line. But the hard face twitched again. A sense of the devouring anxiety he was obviously laboring under made the girl quick to relieve him of any added strain or restraint that he might feel in an unfamiliar presence at such a crisis. Even Louis might be thinking "a woman was in the way." She stood up, murmuring an excuse for going.

The captain, unheeding, went on in that hoarse, muffled voice: "I 've just sent an officer below to see if I can get some volunteers."

"What officer?" said Cheviot. "Not the first?"

"Why not? Yes, the first." And there was a silence so significant that Hildegarde was glad she had not waited for that to tell her she should leave the men to themselves. But at the threshold she had to stand back an instant to let the cabin-boy pass. As he was in the act of darting in with some food, the wind whisked a paper napkin off the tray. He stooped in the doorway, clutched after the elusive object with skinny, yellow fingers, and as he did so the soup slid off the tray and cascaded over the threshold.

The captain swore, and the China boy gabbled as he mopped wildly with the ineffectual paper napkin. "God forgive me if ever I go to sea again with a lot of damned Chinamen. I 'd have tried kedging before this, if I had

a crew that could understand anything but routine orders. As it is I 'll be lucky if I get the coal out in time."

"I can't promise you sailors, but say the word, and I 'll get you some sort of volunteers. How many?"

"Well, just to get the coal overboard we 'll need two or three shifts. And if I have to kedge, after all—it 's no fun!—but with eight *good men* I could do it."

"I 'll undertake to get you the best twenty on the ship, and you can hold a dozen in reserve."

As the girl, at last able to get out dryshod, was going down the companionway, a bird's-eye view of the upper deck gave fresh meaning to the scrap of conversation she had just heard. Out of the black square of the hold the blue-cotton coolies crawled up the ladder with vast burdens to add to the chaos of trunks, crates, and machinery, piled already so perilously high about the deck, and leaving so narrow a gangway for people to crowd through that the able-bodied swarmed over the obstructions.

There was Mrs. Locke reading in a sheltered nook, walled in by towering crates, and just the other side, to leeward of the smoke-stack, Gedge, in close conclave with his body-guard.

When Hildegarde, with some difficulty, reached Mrs. Locke, that lady held up her hand for silence, but, behold, she was n't reading at all. As the girl sank quietly down, Gedge's voice reached her clear, although it was lifted with more than common caution. For ten, fifteen, twenty minutes he must have gone on airing his seditious notions; when Mrs. Locke, half rising, whispered, "If there 's nobody else I think I must go round and talk to those men myself."

Just then a sound of some one flying over the crates on the wings of haste, and Cheviot's voice: "Gedge, are you there?"

"You bet I 'm here," was the surly answer. "And not likely to get away in a hurry, so far 's I see."

"Well, that 's in our own hands."

"Just what I 've been tellin' the boys." But there was a challenge in the voice.

"Your head 's level," said Cheviot.

"Oh, you 're gettin' tired, too! Comin' round, are you?"

"I 've had about enough of this sitting on the bar, if that 's what you mean."

"Then why don't we *do* something?"

"Just what I was going to propose," said Cheviot briskly. "Trouble is there are n't enough hands to get the coal out before—"

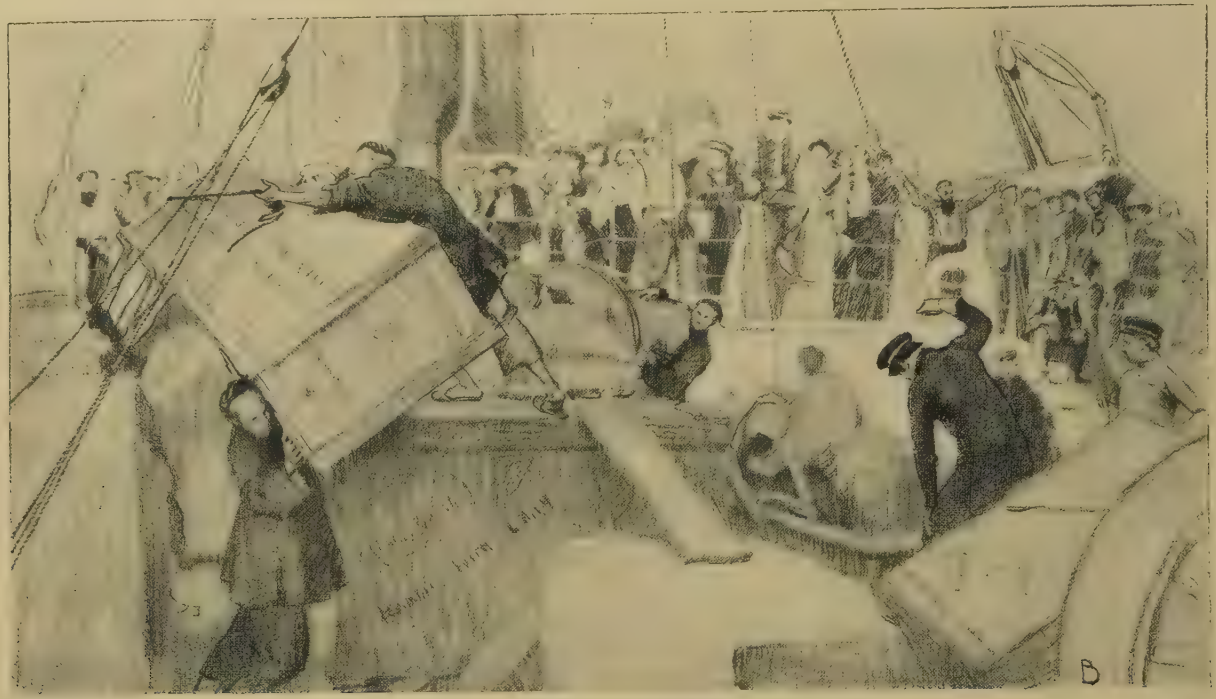
"Oh, yes, we know that 's his excuse."

"His? It 's yours and mine. And a pretty lame excuse, too."

"Was it you," demanded Gedge truculently, "that put it into his empty cocoanut to ask us to lend a hand at pitchin' our own stuff overboard?"

"At present it 's a question of pitching out other fellows' coal." Then lower: "See here, Gedge, I want two words with you."

"No you don't. None of us did n't come up here for 'words.' No, nor to try and patch up the captain's mistakes by turnin' ourselves into beasts o' burden." Cheviot lowered his voice and argued a moment or two, Gedge bursting in with remarks intended to assure his satellites that he was n't being "got at." But Cheviot pressed him hard.



"Coolies crawled up the ladder with vast burdens"

"Well, I 'll tell you what we 'll do. If we ain't goin' to get out of this fix without we turn to and help that fool captain—tell you what we 'll do, boys. If we got to work, we 'll work for Nome wages. Hey, boys? Ten dollars an hour."

"Oh, see here!" said Cheviot, "the captain can't play up to that lead."

"Any feller," shouted Gedge, "that works for a penny less 'n ten dollars an hour is lowerin' the market. He 's an enemy to society. He 's a—"

"He 's simply a fellow with a notion he 'd like to get to Nome. I thought you were a pretty sharp customer, Gedge, but you 're just an everyday sort of ass after all." With which Cheviot climbed back over the crates whistling, as though his momentary concern were at an end.

"Hello!" O'Gorman called out. Cheviot turned aside, when he caught sight of the giant towering over the nook where the two women sat out of the wind.

"What luck?" said O'Gorman, under his breath.

"Four. And you?"

"Only two." O'Gorman motioned with his head toward the smoke-stack, and lowered his voice to a whisper: "He 's got hold of an awful lot of the men."

Cheviot nodded. "Yes. We 're up against that fellow everywhere we turn."

"Always two leaders in every crowd," O'Gorman said. "One to lead up, t' other to lead down. I 'm ready to bet on you!"

They talked in undertones. Only Gedge could be heard distinctly. He was growing hoarse. His increasing audience was taking on the proportions of a mass meeting. But the voice of the popular leader was show-

ing wear. He ended his oration with some abruptness. "Come along, Joslin. Let 's go and licker up."

"Now! Nail him now!" whispered Cheviot, and vaulting over a prodigious pile of machinery he disappeared with Blumpitty and several others into the hold, while O'Gorman darted out in the opposite direction just in time to intercept Gedge and Joslin.

"There 's got to be two shifts. You fellows comin' to help?"

"Help!" Gedge rolled out a brace of handsome oaths. "*Help!* that — captain?"

"No, help us, help yourselves out of this fix." Then, before Gedge could get a word of disclaimer over his lips: "I hear you are worrying about wages. But this is n't a question of money. Lives are at stake. See that ice over yonder? And look here, I 've got more on board this ship than any other one man. Fifteen thousand dollars is what the freight alone has cost me. But to save your life"—he took hold of Gedge's arm—"to save *your* life, every ounce of mine may go overboard, and I 'll help shift it at nothing an hour."

Gedge looked round rather sheepishly, as if he did n't know the answer to this. But suddenly one occurred to him. "I 'm from Missoura," he said. "You got to show me. That other feller, too, the one that was givin' me such a lot of hot air little while ago, why ain't you an' him—"

"You come along with me. I 'll 'show' you." O'Gorman carried the ringleader and Joslin down into the hold. Two hours later Hildegarde, peering over the edge of the square pit, saw among the group engaged in shoveling coal, Gedge, with the face of a blackamoor and

the sweat pouring down. His surplus energy was at last being utilized.

Three hundred and fifty tons were flung overboard before the tide was flood; and again at midnight the muddy water was set boiling, and the big yellow stack belched out clouds of smoke. The stranded ship moved a little, heavily, grudgingly, like a monster half awakened, and then settled down to finish a second night on the bar.

The captain was not the only man who did n't sleep. More than one "sort o' watchman" showed signs of strain the next morning. For the fog was thicker than the day before, the wind veering and no assurance how far away the ice. It was partly the fever of anxiety that found vent in sneers, hardly to be called covert, when it was known the captain meant to take steps to free the ship that afternoon.

"That glass-eyed idiot don't even yet know there ain't but one tide in this part of the world, and that one 's near midnight!" was the discarded pilot's contribution. That Gillies was prepared for the eccentricities of northern tides was credited by few.

Open jeers followed his putting off in a small boat, with the second officer, to sound for deep water. "What 's the good of deeper water a hundred yards from the ship?"

The possible good appeared upon the captain's return. The anchor that the small boat was to carry back (with buoys to mark the place selected) looked big enough to landsmen's eyes, till they saw the lowering of the one to be lashed underneath the long boat. This mighty two-and-a-half-ton iron-grappler, so the rumor ran, was to be used to "kedge" the steamer off the bar.

But where were the sailors coming from to man a boat of this size, let alone to carry out successfully so ticklish an affair?

"It 's all right," Cheviot had said.

Just how it had been made "right" did n't appear. There was no oratory, no public appeal. But three times as many as the captain wanted were offering to go out in the fog and plant the great anchor in the choppy sea.

"I—*me*. You haf bromise I shall go! Not?" A great muscular German was squeezing his way to Cheviot's side.

"All right. No hurry. They 'll be a while yet, getting those buoys right."

The general attention was riveted to the second boat hanging high over the monster anchor that was destined to be bound lengthwise along the keel. How was any craft to make her way mounted in so strange a fashion? How could anybody hope it would n't sink?

"No, the weight will be too well distributed," Cheviot had said.

"Yes, till you start layin' the anchor out yonder," the pilot commented darkly.

Hildegarde made a sign to Cheviot. He came to her across the chain barrier, newly established to keep back the crowd.

Before the girl could speak, "Those heavy ropes," said Mrs. Locke, "that are to lash the big anchor along the bottom of the boat, how will you ever get them undone out there in the choppy water?"

"Cut them," answered Cheviot shortly. "What did you want, Hildegarde?"

She looked at him appealingly, and then, as though

abandoning some quite different point, "My Blumpitty is very sore that you are taking the big German instead of him."

"Can't help that."

"Why did n't you want Blumpitty?"

"Too old."

"Why, he 's only forty something."

"We 've got to have young men for this job."

"Then you think it 's very—"

"No." Cheviot cut her short. "Not if the right men are doing it—a mere matter of precision," and he was going back.

But Mrs. Locke kept him yet a moment. "I 've just heard if one of those ropes is cut the fraction of a second before the others the boat 'll be dragged under?"

"It 's got to be done simultaneously, of course, on a signal," he answered quietly. "I 've just been explaining to Hildegarde it is n't a job for bunglers."

"They say it ought n't to be attempted unless by a disciplined crew."

"But there is n't any disciplined crew,"—he was in the act of stepping across the chain—"and there is n't any other way of getting off the bar."

"There are *other men,*" said Mrs. Locke, quite low.

"Oh, plenty," and he was on the other side. But so was Hildegarde.

"You are n't allowed over here," Cheviot said. She was looking up at the captain and making him a little signal for permission. He nodded, and without a word to Cheviot she went up to Gillies on the bridge. In a few minutes she came down again, but instead of joining the passengers on the other side of the chain, she made

her way to where, a little apart from the group of volunteers, Cheviot stood watching the small boat which, manned by the first officer, O'Gorman, and two others, was bobbing about dimly on the roughened water.

Just as Louis caught sight of her one of the volunteers stepped between them. "What makes those fellows so devilish slow?"

"Doing the best they can," said Cheviot, with an air of not meaning to notice the girl.

"No, they are n't doing the best they can. They are n't even getting our boat lowered."

"They 've had to knock off work a minute. The wind 's playing the mischief with the head-sails."

"Yes, and if we don't look sharp the wind 'll play the mischief with more than the head-sails."

The volunteer looked across Cheviot's shoulder an instant into the thicker fog. Through that veil no man might yet discover if the ice were being driven back against the bar, but all could feel that the need for quick action might be greater than the fog would let them see.

The instant the volunteer went back to the waiting group, Hildegarde drew close to the solitary figure at the railing. "Louis!"

Whether at something new in the girl's low voice, or at a simultaneous shrill dissonance in the thick, chill air, Cheviot started and looked round. "Oh, it 's those Chinamen!" he said, his eyes on the blue-cotton crew hauling at a rope with a kind of wicked hilarity as they sang their barbaric, disquieting chant.

But it was a new experience to find that anything could get on Louis's nerves!

"Is it true you 've been up all night?" Hildegarde

said hurriedly, scanning his face. He nodded, and turned seaward again to watch the little boat planting out bright-colored buoys in the mist.

"Louis, the captain says I may speak to you. Only five minutes, so we must n't waste time pretending. It 's dangerous what you mean to do. Oh, don't be afraid! I 'm not going to try to prevent your going. Only, if you don't come back, Louis"—her voice fell—"I shan't know how to go on living."

For a moment he made no answer, and then, with his eyes still on the dim boat dancing in the mist: "You 're only rather frightened," he said. "Wait till all this has gone by."

"Ah, can't you see? Why is it so hard for you to believe?"

"Because," he said very low, "I know if I did, it would be the signal for the old barrier to rise up again."

"What barrier? You are n't thinking—"

"I 'm thinking this is n't the place for you to—" He checked himself.

"For me to do what?"

"To get rid of your old—" Again he stopped, and then, with an effect of rather bitter patience, "Of course for you he 's the dominating thought up here among the ice."

"No!"

"Do you mean to say he has n't been in your mind a hundred times? Continually?"

"Not continually, because—"

"Well, a hundred remembrances would satisfy most men," he said.

"Would it satisfy you, Louis?"

"No, I should want all, and I know there 's no chance of getting all here."

"I suppose this is n't the time for me to tell you—"

He turned on her almost roughly. "You can't suppose I need to be told what was in your mind when we got caught in the ice? And when that first ship showed on the horizon—" He stopped again, and turned away as one who has said all.

"You"—the mere suggestion took away her breath—"you did n't think it might be—"

"*You* did."

"No, no. I knew, dead or alive, he was on the other side of the world. Or, at nearest, in California."

"I don't tempt him by being sure." The rigid line of his lips looked less like firmness than an effort at control. "If I were to be sure again, especially here, the fog there would open and a ship come sailing through. And it would be his ship. And in a moment your ship, too."

"Don't you know for him to be up here is physically impossible, even if he 's alive?"

Cheviot shook his head. "There are some men—even their ghosts can fight their battles. *His* did, once before."

"I could never have believed you were superstitious."

"May n't I have even that much imagination?"

"You 've forgotten it was all just a dream of mine. Why"—she could n't help giving out a little miserable laugh—"you 've forgotten, just as I used to, that I 've never seen him?"

"I remember I used to wish you had."

"Well, there 's one thing you can't remember, because you never knew it. And that is that I had never

seen *you* in the Valdivia days. It was partly my fault, but not altogether. Men's lives are so hidden from girls. How is it possible for us to know them? We never see them doing things that are worth while. We have n't a notion what they 're like when they 're at work. Only, about *one* man's work I used to think I knew. Of course I did n't, but just to imagine it was something. I was the kind of girl who is n't ambitious for herself. But for the man she— The reason that old 'obsession,' as you called it, took such hold of me, was that *there* was a man who was 'doing things'! I 'd heard all my life about the things he 'd done and the things he meant to do. They seemed already made immortal in a book. But now I 've seen it is n't only he—''

The contrast in achievement cut too cruelly. Cheviot struck the damp railing with his open palm, and laughed out loud.

Though his action dashed her into trembling she drew closer, she pressed against his arm. ''Besides, I 've come at last to care for some one in the only true way—quite apart from anything he may do. I—I love you, Louis.''

The look he turned upon her was very beautiful to the girl. As his hand moved toward her along the railing, under cover of the cape, her own slipped into it.

The wild chant of the Chinamen abruptly ended, and now that nearer, more intelligible sound, the creaking of the falls as the long boat sank from the davits to the sea.

Cheviot, with an effort, turned his eyes away from the girl's face. Together they watched the boat floated over the great anchor that was suspended lengthwise a little

under the surface of the water; together saw the binding fast of the anchor to the boat. And now the two made one were ready. Cheviot took off his overcoat and flung it over the railing. "Will you have an eye to that?"

Her heart was beating painfully. "Do you think I 'll have an eye to spare?"

"Well, keep this in your pocket then." He took off his watch. "And here 's this." He put a little leather case in her hand, smiling and saying hurriedly, under his breath: "With all my worldly goods I thee endow." Then facing about he signaled to his volunteers.

In the undisciplined fashion of her sex, Hildegarde, forgetting to go back behind the barrier, stood at gaze. Cheviot, carrying with him something quick and quivering out of the heart of the girl (something that kept her linked to him not by eye and mind alone, but as by a bond that established oneness of the very flesh, faithfully reporting effort and transmitting feeling), he disappeared over the ship's side after the officer, followed by the six volunteers. With steady eyes the girl watched the buffeting of the heavy-weighted boat, and watched the fog blur it till it looked like something seen in a dream. Cheviot at the bow, by the uniformed figure, less distinct both of them than the big German with his black-and-yellow cap at the stern.

Now the "kedgers" were passing the small boat, and now they had gained the buoys. Hildegarde saw the officer turn, and knew he was giving some direction. Now they were trying to steady the pitching boat directly over the selected site, shown by a buoy faintly vermilion, bobbing to right and to left.

No easy affair to keep the boat there long enough to

plant the great anchor. The officer stood up, and in a sudden lurch all but capsized, steadied himself and seemed to wait. There was a shipping of oars; the picture danced and then dissolved.

No, no, there it was! But what had happened, why did it look so strange? The men! there was n't one in the boat. And so many dim buoys—no, *heads!* Lord, Lord, have mercy! The boat was turned completely over and drowning men were clinging to the keel. Were they all there! Which was Louis? One could n't even count, for the waves would wash over a man and wipe him out. A moment, and there he was again! That, *that* was Louis! Could he keep hold on the plunging keel? (Lord God, be kind!) But he seemed not to have been washed away. He was swimming to the place where a man had been and was no more. Now Louis had hold of him. And there was the other boat—the little one, as though she 'd dropped from the skies, or risen from the bed of the ocean; and she was taking a man on board! Not Louis, but the one who had once gone down—the huge German. Two men! Three were hauled in. Not one of them Louis! He kept a hand on the gunwale of the overcrowded little boat, and swam with it toward the buoys. Why was he and those others still struggling in the water, what were they trying to do? To right the long boat? Oh, let it alone and come back!

After endless moments, Louis and the rest, with the help of the men in the small boat, had got the other right side up again. Now both crews were coming back.

When at last in a shower of cheers, Cheviot, the last of the volunteers, climbed the swinging ladder and smiled up at the face bending over—not till then did

it seem to Hildegarde that the something he had taken away was restored to her, and her body and her soul made whole again.

The people broke through the barrier and pressed round the dripping figures, hurrahing too loud at first to hear how everything was "all right now." They 'd got the anchor where they wanted it, and they had n't lost an inch of cable, and had got a ducking only because a few strands of the confounded rope hung up the falling anchor a fraction of a second longer on one side than on the other.

Very quickly Cheviot seemed to have enough of public enthusiasm. "You might just let us by, so we can get into dry things." But the horde pressed closer. How was this, and how was that? And how the onlookers felt in that awful moment when the boat capsized. In vain Cheviot assured them, "Nobody 's a penny the worse, and the kedging can begin as soon as the tide comes in." Nobody the worse? Yes, one man was. Since he could n't get away, Cheviot created a diversion by laughing at the wet and angry German, who stood outside the press, oblivious of other people's excitement, his own face working with emotion, stretching out his arms and apostrophizing his black-and-yellow cap that floated like some gay sea-bird on the troubled waters. He appealed to the officer to let him go back in the small boat and rescue the precious object.

"You 'd better go and get dry, Guggenheim, for the sake of your family," Cheviot called out, and then to those nearest, "You talk about grit. I tell you we had *one* hero in our crew and one fool, and both together made one large-sized Dutchman."

"Guggenheim?"

"Guggenheim. What do you think? That fellow volunteered without being able to swim!"

There was a roar of laughing amazement.

"Yes, and when we were out there, and the waves were playing battledore with our boat, the fellow says, quiet calmly, 'Ob ve go opsot you fellows yoost most safe me.' 'Save yourself?' says the officer. 'I not can svim,' says the volunteer, and then he told us quite firmly, 'You shall safe me for dat I haf a vife and four childs wid a baby. You vill know me,' he says, 'from my cap.'"

As Cheviot at last pushed his way out of the crush, Hildegarde, close in his wake, still carrying the overcoat, followed him down the companionway. Near the deserted music-room door she slipped her hand in his.

"I 'm too wet for you to come near." But his eyes said nothing of the sort, and dripping as he was, he had her in his arms.

CHAPTER XXII

LATE the next evening, standing with Louis and Captain Gillies on the bridge, Hildegarde saw ships on the western horizon. The fleet at last! anchored two miles off from Nome. It was bedtime, but quite impossible to sleep, though there would be no landing till next day. They said "Good-night" to the captain, and found their way to a corner of the deck, where alone together they might see the belated sun setting, and watch a pale-gold moon of enormous size riding portentously the clear-colored sky, too bright for stars. Hand in hand, hidden among the freight, they talked of the future, arranging it in the high fashion of the young, as though they two had been gods seated on Olympus. And as they talked the faint flush over yonder turned the purest rose, then deepened as each beautiful moment sped, till the sun, gone but now, hastened back like one who abandons a projected journey, and on the heels of his good-by comes shamefaced home. What would it be like, this day that he was bringing? What was waiting over yonder in that mysterious land, still in shadow, that skirts the hills of Nome? Just a little longer the weary passengers hung about the decks, while the blood-red sun peered at them over a violet sea, ready, when the shadow-curtain lifted, to clothe the naked truth of Nome with a final splendor. Whatever might come

after, in this first actual vision of the place people had fared so far to find, it was to wear the hues of heaven. For the "boat-load of failure," the dream they had called "Nome" was to die in a glory of gold and fire.

The decks that had swarmed with excited people were falling silent. Men and women, whose whole lives hung upon what they should find waiting for them yonder, must be in bed betimes, that they might be ready to go ashore in the first boat. Soon only Hildegarde and Cheviot remained. But they were silent, watching all those white sails turn pink against the purple distance—sea and sky alike dyed deep, and still the honey-colored moon hanging there, immense, unreal. Whichever way they looked, this northern world was like something seen in a dream, spectral, uncanny, fitly ushered in by the sunrise in the night.

To Hildegarde, as though given in that hour some gift of prophecy, it seemed that after all her journeying the land she looked on was still beyond the reach of sober day, fated to be for ever outside the experience of waking hours.

Yet this incredible country for two years had been her father's home!

Louis would go ashore in the first boat and prepare Nathaniel Mar for his daughter's coming.

"If I were alone I should be imagining he might be dead." Even as she said "if," an inward dread clutched at her.

"If you were alone I should be imagining things worse than death." They drew together. As he held her, looking down into her eyes, a new gravity came into his own. "Are you sure *at last?*" he said.

"You know I am. But I don't scold you for asking. It 's the more beautiful of you to have quite realized and yet—yet not despise me for all that romantic feeling about some one I 've never seen."

"Your mother once helped me there."

"My mother! What does she know about—"

"More than you might think. When I 'd lost patience one day, she told me the only difference between you and other girls was that you were honester and stubborner than most."

"I can hear her saying 'stubborner.' "

"Yes, but it was curious to hear her saying few women, if they remember their youth, can truthfully say it went by without some such—well—she called it names—"

"I know one of them. Some such silly 'infatuation.' " Hildegarde smiled, but not he. "I wonder if my mother ever— Oh, it 's a wild idea!"

"I don't know. She said it was usually either a great soldier or a clergyman, often an actor, sometimes a poet, or 'even a bachelor statesman.' And she said that last with such an edge in her voice I wondered at the time what American statesman was still unmarried when Mrs. Mar was in her 'teens." And their own cloud was dispersed in smiling at another's.

Hildegarde, coming on deck at six o'clock, found sunshine whitening all the thousand tents of Nome. Frame dwellings, too, the eye found out—one standing boldly forth with flag flying. That, Blumpitty said, was the hospital. Was her father there? Courage! Louis was at her side, with confident looks and shining eyes that saw no shadow save the purple splotch in the sea to the

left—"Sledge Island." Had she noticed the snow-seamed hills? She must take his glass and look at that higher lift in the low, undulant line; could she see a queer knob? *"Anvil Rock!"* But the main impression up the beach, and down the beach, and away over the tundra, was tents, tents. And between the *Los Angeles* and the surf-whitened shore, sails, sails! Ships of every size and kind. Big steamers from Seattle, from San Francisco, Portland, and Vancouver, smart sailing vessels, lumbering freight boats, whalers, and among them—darting back and forth like a flock of brown sparrows under the gleaming wings of seagulls—were myriads of little skiffs, dories, lighters, canoes, and here and there a steam launch, bobbing, swarming, surrounding "the last boat in," and ready to take all and sundry to Nome for dazzling sums.

While the more enterprising of the *Los Angeles'* contingent (swallowing their resentment at the captain's failure to set them instantly ashore) bargained with the owners of the small craft, a rumor ran about the ship that not even a millionaire might leave till certain formalities had been complied with. But Cheviot had in some way got a special permit to go ashore with one of the officers.

While Hildegarde waited after breakfast for his return, she tried to deaden fear of the news he might bring back, listening to the scraps of talk between the touting boatmen and the passengers longingly suspended over the *Los Angeles'* side.

Some old acquaintance called out "Howdy" to the bean-feaster, and after hearing what the Commission had settled in far away Washington, screamed back

Nome news in return. They were "havin' a red hot roarin' boom," and Jolly Haley had made a million. One of the great steamers was spoken as she moved majestically by. Others, besides the *Los Angeles*, were overdue, the captain of the *Akron* said. Those haggard wrecks down there toward Cape Nome—they were only two, but the Bering Sea was full of ships disabled or gone down in these last days. Gillies asked for news of friends and rivals. The *Congress* had put into Dutch Harbor "for repairs," he was told, and the men exchanged grim smiles. The *Santa Ana* was burned to within two feet of the water. The passengers on the *Chiquita* had been all but starved to death, and the *St. John* had made escape from the ice-pack only to go to pieces on the rocks. Then, like some sentient thing exulting in her enviable fate, the *Akron* steamed away in the sunshine.

Popular interest shifted to starboard when the whaler *Beluga* drew 'longside. Her captain, a hard-looking customer, came on board the *Los Angeles* to talk to Gillies. O'Gorman discovered a man he knew on board the whaler. "Going to Nome?" he asked him. "No, better than that. Gettin' out." Where was the ex-Nomite off to? "Up the coast." The *Beluga* was to meet some south-bound whalers up in Grantley Harbor in a day or two—might come south herself afterward, or might go still farther north to Kotzebue. O'Gorman's friend did n't care where, just so it was n't Nome. The people of the *Los Angeles* only laughed. Clear that fellow was a hoodoo. The more luck in Nome, since he was leaving it!

"He might be able to give you news about your

father," O'Gorman said aside to Miss Mar. But before she answered he saw, from the sudden fear in the girl's face, that she could n't risk having bawled at her in public tidings that more and more she dreaded.

"He—Mr. Cheviot will soon be back," she said.

"Has he been in Nome all winter?—your *Beluga* friend?" Mrs. Locke asked O'Gorman.

"Yes, I guess so."

"I 'd like to inquire about my firm, Dixon and Blumenstein." O'Gorman called out the question for her.

"Lots o' folks inquirin' 'bout Dixon and Blumenstein," the man on the whaler roared back.

"How so?"

"Lit out."

"Gone away?"

"You bet."

"What for?"

"Busted."

"Oh, Mrs. Locke, what shall you do?" While Hildegarde, vaguely aware of the unusual sound of a dog howling distractedly, stood beside the woman who in those seconds had seen her hoped-for home, her very bread swept from her, Louis's voice was audible over the girl's shoulder. Hildegarde turned to find herself in her father's arms. She did not notice how wet he was with sea-water. "Oh, you are ill!" she faltered.

"My child! My child!" he kept repeating, and then: "What a journey!"

"But you see I 've got to Nome all right."

"To Nome! God forbid!"

"But God has n't forbidden," said the girl, swallow-

ing the sob that sight of the haggard face had brought into her throat. She was conscious, too, that her fellow-travelers were eagerly listening to the colloquy.

"I 've been telling Cheviot I can't think how he could allow you—" Mr. Mar caught himself up and laid his hand affectionately on the young man's shoulder. "Of course Louis did n't really know. The Nome he left was bad enough, but that Nome has passed away. To-day it is n't a place for a girl to stay in an hour."

" 'Sh! father! You 'll scare my friends. This is Mrs. Blumpitty. She thinks very highly of Nome. And this is Mr. Blumpitty. Mother put me under their care, and they 've been *so* kind. They 've brought a big party up again this year. We 've all come believing great things of the new camp."

The moment the handshaking was over, "This way," Cheviot said, and while the talk buzzed, and the dog somewhere down yonder among the swarming rowboats howled dismally, and questions showered on the man from Nome, Louis was leading Mr. Mar toward the companionway.

"Oh, yes," said Hildegarde, "my suit-case and things. But father need n't trouble to come below. I 've had everything packed and ready *for hours!*" She smiled at Cheviot across the halting figure. "What kept you so, Louis? Could n't you find him?"

"You can't get along very fast over there," Cheviot answered.

"*You* could n't?"

"Nobody can. There 's a wall of stuff piled higgledy-piggledy for a mile along the shore."

"Dingleys and McKeowns, and—"

"Yes, and grub. Tons of it. Hundreds of barrels of whisky. Thousands of bags of flour and beans piled higher than my head. Lumber—acres of it. Furniture and bedding, engines and boilers, mixed up with sides of bacon and blankets, and a sprinkling of centrifugal pumps and Klondike thawers. How they 'll ever sort that chaos—"

"The next high tide will save them the trouble," said Nathaniel Mar.

"Well, it 's a queer sight. Hundreds and hundreds of people, Hildegarde, sitting on top of their worldly goods, looking as if they 'd never stir again. Like so many Robinson Crusoes, each one on his own desert island, among the wreck of his possessions." Hildegarde smiled. Louis was only pointing out that Nome justified his prophecy. A form of "I told you so." But he was speaking to her father. "And the faces! You 're used to them, but I—" He caught Hildegarde's significant little smile and deliberately changed the tune. "Of course there 's a lot of hustling, too," he ended, stopping by the smoking-room door.

"Yes, the old story," said Hildegarde's father, wearily. "All land there free and equal from the common life of the ships. Twenty minutes, and some are masters and others are slaves."

"I thought there 'd be no one here!" Cheviot said with satisfaction, as he held open the door.

"Is n't the boat ready to take us back?" Hildegarde asked.

"I suppose," said her father, leaning heavily on his stick and looking at her from under his bushy eyebrows, "you think we 've got hotels over yonder."

"Oh, no."

"There is n't even a boarding-house—"

"Mrs. L'Estrange *will* be glad! She 's going to set up the very thing, and make her everlasting fortune."

"Well, *I 'm* glad"—Mar dropped into the nearest seat—"very glad you 're a sensible girl and take it like that."

Imagine his thinking she 'd come expecting a hotel and all the comforts of home! That was why he seemed so harassed. "Poor father!" She put an arm about his crooked shoulders. It had been hard for him to make his way over the chaos of the beach, and he had got so wet coming out. How thoughtful of that dear Louis to bring him in here to rest before undertaking the return trip.

The old man crossed his wrinkled hands on the knob of his heavy stick and slowly shook his head. "No, Nome was n't Paradise before, but since the invasion it 's a hell upon earth."

"Oh, father!"

"Well, think of it! Something like forty thousand homeless people stranded over yonder on the beach."

"I 'm glad *you* have n't been one of the homeless ones," she said gently.

"I don't know how glad you 'd be if you saw my one-roomed tent on the boggy tundra."

"Dearest." She took off his big soft hat that impeached his dignity with an absurd operatic air, and she stroked the whitened hair. "It 's well I"—she looked across at her lover—"*we 've* come to look after you."

"Oh, I 'm one of the fortunate Nomites! I tell you a man with *any* sort of shelter over his head is in luck.

Hundreds are sleeping on the beach in the cold and rain."

"Silly people not to buy a tent."

"Most of them did, and can't get it landed or can't find it in the hurly-burly."

"Oh, I hope mine won't get lost!"

"*Yours!*"

"Yes, father, I 've got a tent and two pairs of Hudson Bay blankets, waterproof boots, stout netting—for the mosquitoes, you know. Oh, I have heard all about those mosquitoes! I 've got a canvas knapsack and an oil-stove, and oceans of oil, and a pistol and plenty of chocolates and six weeks' provisions." With a little encouragement she would have told him every item in that six weeks' provision. She was distinctly proud of her list. Many people on the *Los Angeles* had complimented her upon its judicious selection.

But Nathaniel Mar's face showed no pride—showed something even like horror. "I can't think what you were about, Cheviot," he said almost sharply.

Hildegarde was still incredulous that Louis had been able to resist the natural temptation of "telling on her," and saving his own credit. "Does n't father know—anything?"

"Oh, yes, I told him—about us."

"It 's the one redeeming feature in the present situation," said Mr. Mar.

"Father!" She was really wounded by that.

"But as I 've told you already"—he turned his melancholy eyes on the young man—"I 'd take more comfort in the intelligence if you had n't brought her up here!"

"Does he say he brought me?"

"He can't say he prevented you."

"I *would* come. I was afraid we 'd never get you back." She was on the verge of tears.

"Well, well," said Cheviot briskly, "it 's no use spilling milk."

"No," agreed the old man. "It might be worse. After all, the ship is going back in a week and I 'll make arrangements for you to live on board till then."

Hildegarde withdrew her arm. She came and stood in front of the bowed old man. "You can't mean that while I *am* here, I 'm not to stay with you—or in my own tent near—"

"Your tent!" Mr. Mar lifted one hand, calling heaven to witness his offspring's folly. "As to 'near' *me,* I 'm sleeping in a ghastly lodging-house myself at the moment. We pay ten dollars a night for floor space. Spread a blanket on filthy boards, and try to get some rest in spite of drunken rows and vermin."

"I should think even a tent in the bog was better than that."

"Much. I 've lent mine for a few nights to a miserable woman and her daughter, who 'd slept a week on the beach. Like Hildegarde here, they 'bought a tent!' It 's on that steamer we passed. There are half a dozen ships that can't get unloaded."

"I don't know that I like those other women living in your tent," said Hildegarde, with frank envy.

"Some of us are arranging to get the daughter home."

"Not the mother?"

"No."

"She 's going to stay?"

"She 's got consumption."

"Oh!"

"They came in the steerage. No, the mother won't go home, and won't need my tent long, I think."

Hildegarde stroked his hand. "It was like you, father, to give them shelter."

"It 's been pretty much as you saw it this morning"—Mar turned to Louis—"for two weeks now. People are paralyzed. The fall from the height of their anticipations has stunned them. The women sit and wait. For what, they don't know. The men drink and play high, and when they 're cleaned out and can't think of anything else to do, they shoot. There were two men killed last night in a fight over a lot. In the last week there have been six suicides. Nobody minds. What 's the spilling of a little blood? A thing far more important is the scarcity of water. You buy it by the small bucketful and carry it home yourself. If you don't boil it, you get typhoid. The mayor told somebody that, after all, we lacked only two things here—water and good society. The stranger said: 'It 's all the damned lack.'" It was as striking to ears that heard the retort then for the first time as though the saying had not grown hoary. "You 'll see," Mar said, as though Cheviot had denied such a possibility, "it 'll be worse here than ever Dawson was in the toughest times. We have n't got any such body of men to keep the peace as the mounted police."

"And to think it 's all your fault, father."

Mar stared at her.

"Two years ago and nobody cared a pin to go to Nome. You could n't induce the boys to come. You had to bribe even Louis. Now forty thousand people,

and all that tangle on the beach." Her eyes were eager. "Nome, at this minute, must be the most wonderful sight in the world."

"It 's the dump-heap of the nations! I 'll tell you what happened a week ago." Mr. Mar was almost voluble in his anxiety to convince his daughter of the unfitness of Nome as a subject of feminine curiosity. "I 'd been to the A. C. store and got a small draft cashed. Then I went up to Penny River and was gone all day. As I came back, behind the big Music Hall tent, I was held up. Two men turned out my pockets and made off with my thirty dollars. It was no use reporting the robbery. I was very tired, and I went to bed. I was waked up by some one rummaging about. But before I realized what was happening inside, I saw there were holes cut in the off wall of my tent, and two pairs of eyes were watching me. A little lower down the bores of a couple of pistols were sticking through. I lay perfectly still, and presently the man inside, who 'd been going through my grip-sack, threw it down. 'Where do you keep your stuff, anyhow?' he said, and then I recognized him. 'You 're not in luck. You 've got hold of the same person twice,' I said. 'Think we did n't know that?' he said. 'We made such a devilish poor haul we thought we 'd give you another chance. Come along,' he said, 'where do you keep the rest?' And when he found there was n't anything in the tent but a match and a pistol—well, he was good enough to tell me his opinion of me."

"I don't understand—is n't it daylight all night?"

"Yes, but some of the honest people try to sleep, and then the crooks take over the town. The place is full of

the professional criminal class. And if it were n't, Nome, as it is to-day, would breed them. My next-door neighbor says if he owned all the Nome district and owned hell, he 'd sell Nome and live in hell."

"But the thing that brought everybody here—the gold!"

"The sour-doughs are getting some out of the creeks. But there are n't any more windfalls for late comers, since the beach was worked out."

"I did see one or two cheechalkers rocking in a hole here and there," said Cheviot.

"Go back to-morrow; you won't see the same faces. 'Poor man's country!'—where bread costs more than luxuries anywhere else on earth! Any business that 's done in Nome to-day is buying and selling and brokerage precisely as it is in Wall Street. For the moneyless mass there is n't only disappointment, there is n't only hardship; there 's acute suffering down on the beach. I don't know, for my part, where it 's going to end."

"I don't mind not staying *long,*" said Miss Mar obligingly, "in a place where you wake up to find pistols and eyes peering in at you; but I would n't, *for all the world,* I would n't miss just seeing it."

Mr. Mar moved his stick impatiently.

"*I 'd* be willing enough to miss seeing it," said Cheviot, "and I 'm not squeamish either. But, Lord! some of those faces!"

The old man nodded. "I keep away from the water front as much as I can. Can't stand it. I 've never seen such despair in human eyes. If there are lost souls on the earth, I 've seen them on the beach at Nome."

"Well, I dare say a little of it will go a long way with me, too."

"Hildegarde, you 're growing very like your mother."

"Thank you, father," said the girl, imperturbably.

"The trouble is if you insisted on having 'a little' of Nome, you might have to take a great deal," Cheviot said.

"Why might I?"

He exchanged a look with Mr. Mar. "Come out here, Hildegarde, and I 'll show you."

As she followed to the ship's side, "What makes the dog howl so?" she asked. "Look! he 'll be out of that little boat in a minute—he 'll be drowned."

Cheviot leaned over. "Shut up!" he called down. "Say, *Red!* D' you hear? Shut up, I tell you!"

The dog looked critically at Cheviot, ears cocked, nose pointed, forefeet on the gunwale of the lighter, which was bobbing about at the foot of the *Los Angeles'* ladder.

"Louis, is that father's Reddy? Oh, I do so want to make friends with him! Red! Red! how d' you do? Be a good dog, we 're coming down in a minute."

"I 'll get one of the sailors to bring him up. Here"—Cheviot adjusted his glass for her—"now look off there to the right—farther, beyond the wreck of the *Pioneer.* Do you see that big tent with the flag?"

"Yes."

"Can you see what flag it is?"

"It is n't Stars and Stripes. It looks all yellow."

"Yes."

"Who are the people who have a yellow flag?"

"The people who have smallpox. That 's the pest-house."

On their way back they met Blumpitty asking, sadder than ever, if anybody knew how soon quarantine was going to be declared. "Pretty rough on the people who get shut out," murmured Blumpitty.

"Rougher on those who get shut in," said Cheviot.

Joslin was furious at either prospect. "Damned nonsense," he said, "spoilin' the finest boom since '49, all on account of a little smallpox."

They found Mr. Mar in the smoking-room, in the same weary attitude, head hung over his wide breast, hat hung on the sound knee, wooden leg stiffly slanting, eyes among the cigar ashes on the floor.

"Whatever else I do, father, I can't go home without you."

"Oh, I 'll take you home, my dear," said Mar, with alacrity. "I 've nothing to keep me here now, except my claims at Polaris."

"Oh," said the girl, losing some of her gloom, "have *you* got a share in the Mother Lode?"

He smiled faintly at miners' superstition on his daughter's lips. "I 've got something worth looking after," he said, "though, as I told Louis, I wish my good luck was n't always so inaccessible. Only two boats touched Polaris last year. I don't know how it will be this summer. I was n't able to go in either of those that have set off so far. But I sent up a man to do the assessment work."

"I 'll find a way of seeing what he 's made of his job." Cheviot seemed to ratify some arrangement. Then turning to Hildegarde: "And I 'll follow you in the first ship."

"Follow? Can't you go and get back in a week?"

"I might, if there should happen to be a boat." He was touchingly pleased at Hildegarde's unwillingness to go home without him.

Quite suddenly she remembered O'Gorman's loud-voiced friend of the whaler. "I 've got an inspiration," she said gaily. "Why should n't we all three go up to Polaris in the bark *Beluga?* Yes, yes, that whaler alongside is going north in a day or two. Now, don't say it 's impossible till you see." Quickly she outlined a delightful plan. They could all come back in one of the boats waiting about in Grantley Harbor. Or why should n't they (after they 'd attended to the Mother Lode), why should n't they go in the *Beluga* as far as Kotzebue? Nobody realized in the very least, she said, her immense interest in all this queer northern world. And after what she 'd gone through to get here, they wanted to forbid her Nome! Adroitly she spoke, as though their success were still a matter of doubt. *If* she did n't see Nome, oh, how she 'd be laughed at in Valdivia! But *if* she did n't, why should n't she be a little compensated for so huge a disappointment? But that was n't the main consideration. How could anybody expect her to go away in this very same horrible boat that had brought her, and go *without* Louis? Was her father grown so hard-hearted up here as to expect to part them when they 'd only just found each other? Half-smiling, but serious enough in reality, as Mar could see, she pleaded for her plan. Louis was plainly a convert, though he did say in a feeble and highly unconvinced fashion, that if he had n't used up all his credit with her on the subject of travel, he 'd point out that the accommodation on board these coasting vessels—

"Oh, *don't* be so careful of me—you two!" she

wailed. "The reasons why I must n't see Nome surely don't apply to Polaris. Why may n't I have a look at that miraculous Mother Lode? Besides, Polaris! why, that 's where Blumpitty's hermit lives! Dearest father, I 've been dying to see the hermit. Was it he who told you, too, where to get claims?"

"Certainly not. I would n't go near the imposter! Living on people's greedy hopes. That 'll come to an end, too, some fine day!"

"Well, if it has n't come to an end yet, you won't mind my seeing him, will you, dearest? It is n't just idle curiosity. You really ought to sympathize a little. I must have got it from you—all this interest in the North, that we used to think was left out of the rest of the family. Don't you remember, I never wondered at the hold it had on you? Even when I was quite little—" She pulled herself up suddenly, with an anxious glance at Cheviot's averted face. But he turned briskly at that first pause and said: "I 'll leave you to butter the parsnips, Hildegarde, while I tackle the captain."

When Cheviot had gone, "What 's the news?" said Mar.

"Oh, they 're all well, and the boys are getting on splendidly. Mother sends you—"

"Nothing yet from Jack Galbraith?"

"Nothing, up to the day I left. Father, it bores Louis dreadfully, hearing about—arctic exploration. We won't talk about Jack Galbraith before Louis. But I 've often thought, while I 'm crawling up this side of the round world, Jack is probably sliding down the other."

"It 's one of the reasons for going home," said the old man, thinking aloud.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was after some delay through fogs that, on a clear July morning to Hildegarde for ever memorable, the small whaling vessel *Beluga* anchored below the cape called Prince of Wales, that looks across the narrow Strait of Bering to the Siberian shore. The girl, with her new friend Reddy at her side, overheard with inattentive ear her father's final instructions. Mar, whose difficulty in getting about was obviously increased in these months of absence, had agreed to remain on board. Cheviot's the task of making the most of the brief span granted by the surly captain for inquiry into the condition of the gold camp two miles across the surf, and two more inland up Polaris Creek.

But if the talk between the men about possible claim-jumpers, treatment of "tailings," increase of water-power, double shifts, and clean-ups—if such matters held but a modified interest for the girl on this golden morning, not so the scene itself. Even in the gray light of yesterday, when, toward bedtime, the thicker fog-veils lifted enough to show how far the *Beluga* had gone out of her course, the girl had thrilled at the misty vision of the Diomede Islands. For one of these showed the fringe of Asia. Hildegarde had reached that place in her journeying where the East was become the West,

and where to find the farthest limit of the immemorial Orient you must needs look toward the setting sun.

To-day, coming on deck before she broke her fast, something in the girl had cried out greeting at her first glimpse of the coast-line bluffs of extreme northwestern Alaska, drawn in purple against a radiant east, to the south receding a little from the shore and fainting into the blue of snow-flecked hills having a strip of tundra at their feet.

There, upon that narrow coastwise margin, directly in front of what from the deck of the *Beluga* seemed the highest point in the background, the sunshine picked out boldly the intense white of the handful of tents that stood for the settlement of Polaris and the port for the Polaris mining-camp.

Hildegarde had won her father's consent, reluctant though it was, that she should go ashore with Cheviot. Gaily she assured him it was little compensation enough to a girl who had foregone the fearful joys of Nome. The visit of inspection to the Polaris claims would not take long. As the old man looked at his "two children," with the sunshine on their faces, he wondered who would have the heart to steal from them a single one of those early hours of enchantment.

Not Nathaniel Mar.

But neither he nor they had bargained for Reddy's bearing them company. He announced his intention unmistakably, when Cheviot went over the ship's side into the small boat that was to take him and Hildegarde through the surf. Mar tried in vain to quiet the beast. So unnerving were Mr. Reddy's demonstrations, when he saw Hildegarde preparing to follow Cheviot, that

Mar called out, Hildegarde must wait till the dog could be shut up; the sailors could hardly hold him. But the men below, bobbing about on the rough water, were with difficulty preventing the boat from being battered against the ship's side, and Cheviot was shouting, "No time to worry with the dog!"

At the same moment, Hildegarde, hanging suspended between her two counselors on the swinging ladder, saw a big wave sweeping askew the boat beneath her. From above her father, and Cheviot from below, called out "Hold tight," while Louis supplemented the vain efforts of the two other men, unable by themselves to steady the clumsy craft in such a sea. But Hildegarde, with a conviction that Reddy, escaping out of a sailor's arms, was in the act of coming down on her head, jumped from the ladder and landed in the boat with the dog and a twisted ankle. Instantly she called up to her horrified father, "I 'm all right, and so is Reddy." Whereupon the boat was swung out into open water. They had gone half a mile before Cheviot discovered something was amiss. "Nothing the least serious," she said, though it would be serious enough for her if she were cheated of the two or three hours' wandering at Louis's side on this heaven-sent morning through the wild, sunshiny land across the surf. Cheviot was for turning round at once and taking her back to the steamer, but that would be to prolong by a mile a sufficiently difficult transit. He would send her back after the boat had landed him.

"No, no," she pleaded. "If I can't walk, I 'll wait for you on shore."

But Cheviot was giving the sailors directions about getting her safely back to the *Beluga*.

Then, for the first time, the girl spoke of the stark discomfort that reigned aboard the whaler, how she longed for a little respite, and how she longed— But the landward-looking eyes could not, down here in the deep sea furrows, pick out the far-shining tents toward which the lighter was plunging, down the watery dales and up on foamy hills, and down again to shining green deeps that shut out ship and shore—holding the small boat hugged an uneasy instant in the rocking lap of the sea. Yet the girl clung to the memory of that early morning vision from the deck, of violet headlands and snow-filled hollows, and as the boat rode high again on the top of the next big breaker, she drew in rapturous breath, saying softly of the land beckoning her across the furious surf, "The 'farthest North' that I shall know!" But in the end she owed it to Reddy's companionship that Cheviot let her have her way.

"Oh, what an old-fashioned *Turk* of a man I shall have to spend my life with!" But she laughed for joy at the prospect.

As Cheviot, sharply scrutinizing the harborless shore, directed the boat above the settlement: "Some better landing-place round the point?" she asked.

"I don't expect a landing-place on this coast, but I don't see even the tumble-down sod hut your father talked about."

The boat shot up out of a boiling hollow, and as it climbed the slippery back of a great wave, Hildegarde called out, "I see it!"

"The hut? Where?"

"All alone, over yonder. Just beyond those rocks. That 's where you and I will sit and wait, won't we, Red? Those rocks are farther north than where the tents are shining—'farther north,' do you hear, Mr. Red?"

Beyond the chaos of boulders, in a cloud of spray, the boat was not so much beached as daringly run in and her passengers ejected, all in that breathless instant before the turbulent water withdrew, carrying out the clumsy craft as lightly as it would a cork. And now already the toiling sailors were some yards on their way back, disappearing round the point. Hildegarde was safe on a temporary perch, and Reddy much occupied in howling defiance at each thunderous onslaught of the surf. Cheviot, thinking to combine the girl's appeal for "a good observatory" with his own notion of an easy niche safe beyond the tide's reach, went to spy out the land over there where some mighty storm had piled the rocks. At sight of a man skulking among the boulders, Cheviot called out, "Hello!"

With a certain reluctance the bearded figure shuffled into fuller view. "Hello!" he said, without enthusiasm.

"Do you belong here?" he was asked.

"Sort o'."

"Oh—a—anything doing?"

"Where?"

"Why, here."

"*Here?* What d' y' expect anybody to do *here?*"

"Is n't there a camp just over yonder?"

"Up in the hills. Yep, there 's a camp there all right."

"Nothing in it, though?"

"Plenty. Things are boomin' out there. Thought

you meant *here.*'' And he looked past the new arrivals in an unpleasant, shifty fashion.

They exchanged glances. Hildegarde was so sure Louis would n't go away and leave such an individual hanging about that she felt no surprise at hearing him offered money ''to come along and show the way.''

When the two had agreed on the price of this service, Cheviot said: ''I 'll be ready in a minute. I want to find a more comfortable seat for this lady,'' and off he bolted toward the rocks.

The man eyed Hildegarde askance, and made some observation.

''I can't hear you,'' she called, above the noise of the surf.

He shuffled nearer. ''Ain't you goin', too?''

''Out to the mines? No.''

''What y' goin' t' do?'' he asked.

The girl laughed. ''Oh, just stay here and look at things.''

''What things?'' The uneasy eye shot out a sudden alert beam.

She only smiled, as her own glance wandered to the wider vision.

''I got some 'things' to see after m'self,'' he said in a surly tone. ''Guess I ain't got time to go to no gulch to-day.''

The girl fell a prey to misgiving lest this incident should end in dissuading Louis from leaving her at all. Was her insistence upon coming to result in defeat of the expedition?

The shifty man had drawn a trifle nearer still and lowered his voice. ''What made yer land here?''

"It did n't seem to matter where we landed. There 's no harbor."

"But here yer so—" It occurred to Hildegarde, for some inexplicable reason, he was going to add, "so near that hut," instead of what he did say, "so fur from town."

At the obvious suspicion on the man's face, Hildegarde smiled to herself. If this uncouth apparition had inspired distrust in the new arrivals, their appearance had precisely the same effect on him.

"Y' might 'a' come and gone before anybuddy in the town knowed we 'd had visitors," he said, with an air indescribably sly.

"Well, you see, our business is n't in the town. We 're nearer the diggings here, are n't we?"

"Guess yer been here afore."

"No, neither of us."

"Then yer better come along with me and him, an' have a look at the gulch."

So he did n't, after all, want to remain behind and murder her for her watch!

"No, I shall stay here, and while you and my friend are gone, I 'll practise shooting at a mark." As she drew her little revolver out of her pocket, and the silver mounting caught the sunlight, she recognized herself for a very astute person. Louis, if no one else, might quite well need reminding that she was armed.

"Y' won't go?" the man persisted. "Well, I guess I ain't got time fur it neither. I ought to see a man up at the store."

In the act of going forward to meet Cheviot with this

information, the unaccountable creature paused to say over his shoulder: "Yer sure to git a nugget if yer go to the gulch."

"I 'd go quick enough if I could walk."

He faced about. "Y' can't *walk!*" It seemed somehow to make a difference, but he narrowed his little eyes. "Why can't yer?"

"I 've sprained my ankle."

"Oh! Bad?"

"I 'm afraid so. I 've been told not to put my foot to the ground—or else I 'd hobble to the town and hunt up a man I 've heard lives hereabouts." Ah, *that* interested the disreputable one quite as much, apparently, as it did Miss Mar. "I wonder if *you* know him! A queer, hermit sort of person who discovered the—What 's the matter?"

"I knowed all along what ye 'd come fur."

"Oh, we did n't *come* for that—it was only my idea—but it 's not much good now I 'm crippled."

"What did yer want to see him fur?"

"Oh, just to hear him talk."

"Ye-es. I been told they 's a lot would 'a' liked to hear him talk, only it 's no go. And people gits tired o' feedin' a feller with such a parshallity fur keepin' his mouth shut."

Cheviot had come back with, "Put that away!" as he caught sight of the revolver. "I 've made a kind of chair for you, and lined it with overcoat." He half carried her over to the rocks, while she clung to him, sparing the hurt foot. The man with the long, lank chinbeard, like the last nine inches of a cow's tail, watched proceedings with a critical eye.

"There now!" Louis had established her to his satisfaction. "And Red 'll take care of you since he 's grown such a gentleman. You hear, Red?" he admonished the cock-eared dog.

"Reddy hears, and Reddy 'll do it, but if I were n't so hopelessly happy I 'd be rather miserable at finding myself a prisoner. *This* day of all days in the year!" And, in spite of Cheviot's assurance that he was n't going to be long, she looked a little wistfully after her lover.

"It 's all right," his queer guide hung back a moment to assure her. "It don't reely matter as much as you think."

"Oh, it *does n't!*"

"No, fur he ain't here."

"Who? The—"

"Yep—feller y' come to see."

She humored him. "You mean the—"

"Yep."

"Come along, Father Christmas," shouted Cheviot, taking the tundra on a run.

"Father Christmas! D' ye hear wot he 's callin' me?"

"Where is he, then?" Hildegarde persisted.

"Dead."

"Oh, I 'm disappointed to hear that. You *are* too young for Father Christmas, but I was beginning to hope you might be the hermit."

She took her disappointment so light-heartedly that the odd creature grinned.

"Golly, don't I wish I *wus* 'the hermit,' " he muttered, as he scrambled up the tundra after Cheviot.

What nonsense to talk of being a prisoner! Her eyes were free to roam, and her heart was light as a bird's homing across the shining world toward the shining future. She must remember always in the happiness that was coming, how she first had seen it at its vividest from a throne of rocks, sitting between the tundra and the sea. Oh, but she was glad she had come! If it was Cheviot's mission to see how work went on at the gold camp, hers no less to see with her own eyes—to get by heart and keep for ever—the aspect of the world up here where you touch the skirts of the uttermost North. Happy, happy chance that vouchsafed the vision on one of those unmatched days of the short arctic summer that she 'd heard about so long ago—a day that made you feel never before have you seen the sunshine showering such a glory on the world, never known such color on the sea, never felt the sweet wind bringing influence so magical. You unfurl the banner of your spirit, and you carry the splendid hour like a flag, looking abroad and saying: "This is what it is, then, to be alive. And I—I am still among the living!"

In that same hour, a few yards from where Hildegarde sat waiting, a man was saying farewell to sun and sea and all the shining ways of all the world; and this man, dying in the peat hut at the tundra's edge, was that one of all who heap up riches having most to leave behind.

There was nothing about the solitary hovel that specially arrested the girl's attention. She had seen several such on the way, during the delay at Grantley Harbor—rude makeshift shelters, deserted in favor of the booming camp at Nome. But Reddy found the sod hut somehow interesting, even suspicious. He had gone away to

snuff at the threshold. He tore back to Hildegarde to report, then off again. Now he had set his sharp nose against the door, and now he howled softly. In the momentary lull of surf drawn seaward, to Hildegarde's surprise, a responsive whine came weakly forth from the hut. Whereat Red's excitement was so great that the girl forgot her ankle and stood up to quiet him. Why, the ankle hardly hurt at all! She might have gone—could she, even now, catch up with Louis? She picked her way across the rocks with scarce a twinge of pain, and she climbed upon the thick moss carpet of the tundra. Of course she could have gone! But Louis was out of sight. To say sooth, she was in a mood too happy to be cast down. For, as she had just been feeling, it was one of those hours when all life seems to be waiting for one to come and claim it, when a girl feels she has just this little time for pausing at the gate, to give the glad eyes full possession before she enters in. She takes the sunshine on her face, and all her being melts to gold, and has its little share in making the wide earth shine. Even her secret dreams are dissolved in the universal sea. Instead of hoping, fearing, her heart floats like an idle boat in that shifting iridescence. In the air, instead of trumpet-call and battle-cry only a long, low singing on the beach. No; one thing beside—a faint whining from within a deserted hovel. Again, from without, the beast before the desolate threshold woke the hill-born echoes with his howling. Surely a stray dog had got in there and been unable to get out. She would open the door barely wide enough to throw him some of the pilot bread she 'd brought in her pocket for luncheon. She lifted a hand to the rude latch, but, instead of open-

ing the door outright, sheer habit, with nothing in it of reflection, made her first of all knock. "Come in," said a voice. She started back, and held her breath. Again that low: "Come in."

It seemed to her that she must run, and at the same time even more that she must obey the voice. Oh, why had she come? Taking uncertain hold of her courage she pushed the door ajar. Red flung it wide by bounding in before her. She had time only to see that a man, half-sitting up on a camp bed, with a gray army blanket over his knees, was whittling away at a long, narrow bit of flat wood. She hardly noticed at the moment, though she remembered later, that when he saw a stranger at his door, he dropped his knife and made an automatic action to lay protecting hands on a dingy bundle, half out, half under the low bed. Hildegarde's attention was of necessity centered in the dogs; his, shaky and half-blind, conducting defense from the foot of the bed. The girl laid hold on Red's collar and dragged him back, although it was plain now she had done so, that he considered the decrepit animal, half-muffled in the blanket, as vanquished already and quite unworthy of more consideration than could be conveyed in a final volley of scornful howls. After which relief to his feelings, Hildegarde's fellow-intruder pointedly turned his back and went sniffing about the forlorn little room.

"I am sorry we disturbed you," the girl said to the hollow-eyed, unkempt being on the bed. There were curious scars on the wasted face set in its frame of wild, tawny hair and wilder, tawnier beard. No scattering of silver here and there, but just at the temples the hair was white as wool. As she saw plainer now, being used

to the dimness, the face, striking as it was, impressed her chiefly through that quality of special ghastliness produced by a pallor that shows clay-like under tan. "I thought," she said, winding up her apology—"I thought the dog was shut up here alone—forgotten."

"It might come to be like that," he said, and paused an instant, as if for breath. When he spoke again it was less to his visitor than as if to soothe the ruffled feelings of the miserable beast at his feet. "It won't be my fault, though," he said. "I 'll forget most things before I forget you, shan't I, Ky?"

"That is how his master feels about this dog, too, though *he 's* nothing but a mongrel," Hildegarde said. She was thinking, "The man is very ill."

"His master—some one prospecting hereabouts?"

Briefly Hildegarde explained. As she moved toward the door, she caught an expression on the sunken face so arresting that straightway she said to herself: "What is a starving dog more than a dying man, that I should come to help the one and flee the other?"

"I am afraid you are very ill."

"Yes," he answered quietly.

"There 's some one at the settlement who looks after you?"

He smiled faintly. "They 've given me up as a bad investment."

"Oh!" broke from the girl's lips, as she leaned forward and then caught herself up. Was the hermit not dead after all! Was she face to face at last with the discoverer of the Mother Lode? If so, she must n't seem to know. "Is n't there any doctor here?" she added hurriedly.

"There 's a fellow they *call* 'doctor.' "

"Then let me go for him."

"He 's off prospecting."

"When will he be back?"

"After I 'm gone, I guess."

"Oh, you are leaving here?" and the moment she said it she felt the cruelty of the question.

But he only answered "Yes," and left her to miss or to divine his meaning. Looking in his face she forgot his character of hermit, and fell to wondering whom he had in the world to care about his leaving it. Instinctively she knew that a man with such a spirit looking out of eyes like those—for a man like this to die, meant to some one far away the worst that could befall. And suddenly she felt that she was enviable, being there, if in some way she could help him. What was there she might do?

He glanced at the foot of the bed, where the old dog lay at his feet. "When did you say you were going back to your ship?"

"Not for an hour or so," she said. "More than long enough for me to—when did you eat last?"

"If you 'd give me a little water," he spoke huskily.

She went to a zinc bucket that stood in the corner. "I 'm afraid this is n't fresh," she said.

"Yes. An old fellow brought it only an hour ago. There 's the cup."

She followed his eyes to a rusty condensed-milk can, which she filled and rinsed, saying cheerfully: "Then some one *does* look after you?"

"No, it is n't after me the old scoundrel looks." With great eyes darkening, he lowered his voice: "Is he hanging about still? A sort of tramp with—"

"No, the man I think you mean has gone out to the gulch."

"H'm! Tired of waiting! We saw that in his face when he brought in the water, did n't we, Ky?" The dog raised her head. "Yes, he was n't anything like as afraid of you, Ky, as he used to be. Time 's short." He pulled himself up and fell to work with a knife upon the piece of wood that lay on the gray blanket.

Suspiciousness has made him brain-sick, thought the girl. She dried the dripping can on her handkerchief as she looked over at the dog. "Poor Ky. What happened to her eye?"

"Left it up yonder." He glanced through the open door to the white surf curling up above the tundra, and with his wild head he made a little motion to the north. But not even long enough to drink did he stop his feverish whittling. As she put the cup on a tin cracker-box, set within his reach, she saw there was a little heap of shavings and splinters in the hollow of the blanket between the man's gaunt knees, and she noticed that he held his knife with grotesque awkwardness. Then, with an inward shrinking, saw that to every finger but two, the final joint or more was lacking. "How dreadfully you 've been hurt."

He looked up and then followed the direction of her glance. "Yes, I got a good deal mauled"—only half-articulate the iterated burden—"up yonder."

His voice made her heart ache for pity of such utter weakness. The task he had set himself looked as painful as impossible. Yet remembering the solace whittling seems to be to certain backwoodsmen: "Do you do that for amusement?" she asked diffidently.

"If that 's what it is, I shan't lack entertainment."

She looked wonderingly in his face.

"I was weeks before cutting up a little wood. But somebody stole it. Scarcer than gold up here."

Oh, yes, the discoverer of the Mother Lode had stores of the precious metal hidden away somewhere. The skulker among the rocks—*he* knew!

"Let me help." She went closer with outstretched hand. But he started and dropped the clumsily held wood. It all happened in an instant. Hildegarde, following the look on the wild face he was bending down, saw that his concern was not for the precious and sole piece of timber in the hut, but for the oilskin bundle under the bed, which her dog was in the act of investigating. The half-blind beast on the blanket saw, too. She made one bound and fell upon Hildegarde's companion with a fury that filled the narrow space with noise of battle. The sick man called off his dog, while Hildegarde reviled hers and tugged at his collar.

When peace was again restored, "I must take him away," said his mistress. "He 's behaving very badly."

"No, it will be all right if I—" The sick man leaned still further over the side of the narrow bed, and fastened the hand Hildegarde could n't bear to look at under the knotted oilskin.

As she saw him feebly straining to lift it: "Oh, let me," she said, and bent to help him.

Again his dog flew to the rescue, while the man himself, with a desperate final effort, almost snatched the bundle from under her fingers. "I—I beg your pardon," he said panting, and again he made his dog lie down.

But Hildegarde's feelings were a little hurt. The normal miner, she had always understood, showed people his gold—even trusted them to handle it.

"Poor old Ky," the sick man went on apologetically; "she has got so used to guarding this"—he was himself positively hugging the unsavory bundle—"she can't see any other creature come near it without—"

"You 're quite as bad," Hildegarde said to herself, but a glance at the face, with the look of doom in the eyes, made her set down his excitement, and the failure in fairly judging her, to the darkening of all things in the gathering shadow.

"I suppose you think I have something very valuable here?" he said, suspiciously.

"It would n't be the first time in Alaska that something valuable has been wrapped in rags and left lying in a corner."

"Something like what I 've got here?" he asked, as he took tighter hold on the oilskin.

He should not think she was curious about his gold dust and his nuggets. She looked at Ky climbing with difficulty back to her place at the foot of the bed, and pointedly changed the subject. "Your dog is very lame."

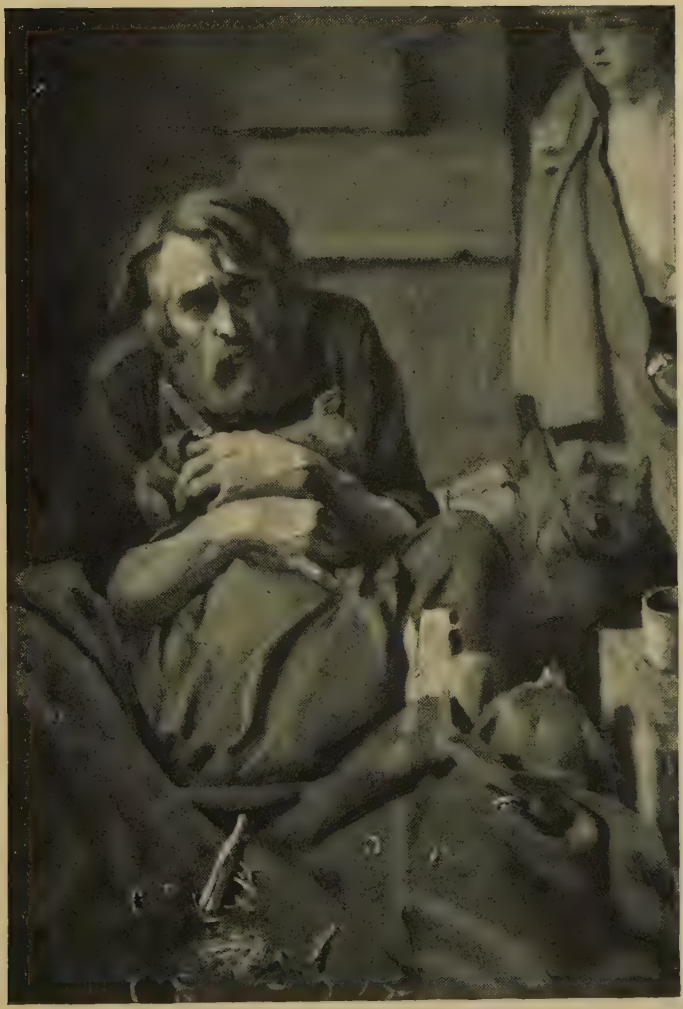
He nodded. "Got one of her paws crushed."

To distract him from his brain-sick anxiety about the bundle, "How was that?" Hildegarde asked. No answer this time, only that same northward motion. "She must be very old," Hildegarde pursued.

"No."

"Your dog, I mean. Surely she is old."

"No. She got like that—up—"



"'I suppose you think I have something very valuable here?'"

He still clutched the oilskin with such anxious hands that Hildegarde felt it mere humanity to win him to forget his fears. So she looked away from the gaunt figure, over the threshold and over the surf to where the white sails of the *Beluga* shone.

"I 've been 'up yonder,' too," she said.

"*What!*"

"Yes, I 've seen the North Siberian shore quite plain. I 've been as far as the Bering Straits."

"Oh, the Bering Straits!" he echoed, as one inwardly amused at a traveler who should boast of getting as far as the adjoining county.

"Yes, and—and I 'd like to go further still."

"Better not—better not."

"But, of course, I would!" She put her hand in the pocket of her long cloak and drew out the "latest map" of extreme northwestern Alaska. "I 'm like the rest. The more I see up here, the more I want to see." She sat down on the earthen floor just inside the threshold, and spread out the yard square tinted paper. As she bent over it, "What part of the map lures you most?" she asked, wondering if she would hear where was the home of this curious being dying up here alone.

As he did not answer at once, she looked up, laying her hand on the paper and saying, "This for me."

She saw him take surer hold on the packet he was guarding, and he leaned across it to see precisely what portion of the earth's surface her hand was covering.

"You want to know the name of the most interesting country in the world?" she asked smiling.

"Well, what do you say?" He seemed to humor her.

"The name of the most interesting country on the face

of the globe is under my hand.'' She lifted it. He peered down. She pushed the rustling paper across the uneven floor, till leaning over he could read, in big black letters, the word ''UNEXPLORED.''

''Ah!'' he said softly, with as great a light in his face as if those letters had indeed spelled home. ''*You* feel that? I did n't know that women—'' He broke off, and absently took a fresh hold on the bundle, as though anticipating some adroit attempt upon his treasure.

His foolishness about that packet had got upon Hildegarde's nerves. ''People who don't know them think Chinamen are all alike. Men who know little of women think the same of us.''

He smiled. ''Do you mean you realize how precious those blank spaces are?'' Again he craned weakly over the bundle and stared down at the map. The thought again occurred to her that his look was like the look a wanderer turns home. Wondering about him she hardly listened to the words he was saying, how the kingdom of the unknown shrinks and shrinks and soon shall vanish from the maps—worse still, own no dominion any more over the minds of men.

Whether he was indulging some fantasy of fever she could not tell, but the scarred face wore a look so high and sorrowful that she found herself saying, ''Surely the only value of the empty space is that some man may one day set a name there.''

He threw her a pitying look. And he stroked the oilskin as a child might caress a kitten.

''I see,'' she said, trying in self-defense to be a little superior, ''*you* don't, after all, sympathize with the explorer spirit.''

At which the strange eyes rewarded her with sudden smiling. "If you mean you do," he said, "think for a moment what a power the unknown has been in history. Think what it 's done for people—a mere empty space upon the map—"

"Yes," she threw in, "it has made heroes."

"It has made men." But for all the restrained quietness of tone his look evoked a glorious company.

"Yes," she agreed. "It made Columbus, and it made Cortez. It made Magellan, Drake, and Cook, Livingstone and—"

"And all the millions more," he interrupted, still on that quiet note, "who only planned or dreamed." But while he spoke his maimed fingers wandered over the oilskin—a brain-sick miser guarding his gold. And though she listened to what he said, her eyes, against her will, kept surreptitiously revisiting the uncouth bundle he was fondling with abhorrent hands.

"I feel like a son of that land"—one hand left the bundle an instant and pointed down at the map—"*The Unexplored.* Like a man who sees his mother country filched from him bit by bit, parceled out and brought under subjection. Yes"—he raised his voice suddenly to such a note as set the girl's nerves unaccountably to thrilling—"yes, I resent the partition of that empire. It is the oldest on the earth. I am glad I shall not see its passing." He leaned back, and a grayness gathered on his face as he ended: "Many a man will be without a country, many a soul will be homeless when the last province of that kingdom yields."

She only nodded, but he suddenly began afresh, as though she had contributed something convincing. "I

have never talked of these things to a woman, but since you seem to feel the significance of—" He broke of, and then slowly, "It might be you could help me," he said.

"How could I—"

Still clinging feverishly to the knotted oilskin, he dragged himself with difficulty to an upright posture and craned forward to stare through the open door. Not this time northward solely, but down the beach as well as up.

"What are you looking for?" asked the girl.

As he sat there huddled, silent, she became conscious that he was listening—listening with that sort of strained intentness that almost creates sound, does create it to the sense accessible to hypnotic influence.

"Who is that outside?" he said very low.

"No one," she answered, though it seemed to her, too, there must be some one there.

"Look out and see."

As she got up to obey him, "But you won't go away," he said suddenly.

"No, only as far as—"

"Don't go out of sight!" There was an excitement in his voice that gave her a moment's fear of him. Out of the dank little hut his voice followed her into the sunshine: "Is he there again?"

"No one," she answered, "no one at all! Except—"

To the south, on the edge of the tiny settlement, a group of Esquimaux. It must have been their voices his quick ear had caught now and then above the surf.

Northward, up the curving beach, two men calking a boat. But though they stood out vivid in that wonderful

light, Hildegarde knew they must be half a mile away; and so she told him.

"Is that all?"

Nothing more. Not a creature on the treeless hill rising behind the hovel. In front of where the girl stood no soul nearer than where the bark *Beluga* set her transfigured sails against the western limit of the world. Between her and that sole link with her own life, only the long barrier of the battling surf. From within, the feeble voice saying indistinguishable words that yet conveyed some feverish purpose. A sudden temptation seized the girl to call her dog and run.

"You are sure"—the weak voice came to meet her as she turned back—"sure there is n't an old man about—fellow with a hungry face and a long, lank beard?"

"And an hour-glass and a scythe," she filled out the picture to herself. Yes. One like that is lurking here at the door, and no man can bar him out and none refuse to follow at his call. But aloud, "No one," she said.

"Then come in and shut the door." And again she thought of flight, and again put the impulse by. But she said if the door were shut she must go, and made her excuse the need to keep an eye out for her friend. Then she sat down as before, where she could command the beach.

The sick man was obviously ill-pleased and not a little scornful. "You will understand why I don't want to be overheard when I tell you—" Again he sent the searching glance into that square of the world the driftwood lintel framed, and his voice was half a whisper. "You 'll understand when I tell you I have a legacy to leave." He waited.

"Yes," said Hildegarde.

"How did you know!" he demanded, and the eyes were less friendly.

"Oh, I did n't *know.*"

"You suspected—"

"Well, most people, however poor, have something to leave, however little."

He lifted his hand to silence the platitude, and his whisper reached her clear and sharp: "I am leaving more than ever a man left before."

It was true then about the Mother Lode. She waited, hardly breathing. He had said she could help him. He wanted a letter written or witness to a will, but he had fallen back upon that strained listening. "You have children?" Hildegarde asked.

He made a barely perceptible motion, no.

"Brothers and sisters?" She tried to help his memory.

"No."

"Who, then?"

"My legacy 's too great to leave to any individual." Hildegarde's eyes kindled with excitement. All the talk about Nome had given her a sense of living in an atmosphere of mighty enterprise, of giant losses, and of fabulous gain. She was primed to hear of lucky millions stumbled on by chance.

"You want to make a bequest to the nation?" Why was he hesitating, she wondered impatiently, as he flung again that same intent look out of doors? She knew he could see nothing but the wild, white horses climbing the rocky shore to look across the tundra. She knew he could

hear nothing but the thunder of their hoof-beats on the beach.

At last he spoke. "They said my trouble was ambition." And still his ears waited for some sound beyond Hildegarde's hearing, and still his eyes saw more than hers.

He was silent so long she adventured in the dark, "Did you leave ambition 'up yonder,' too?"

"Yes, up yonder!" But he brought out the words triumphantly, and he paused upon a broken breath still listening. "Ky," he whispered, "the lady likes exploring, but she 's afraid to shut the door. Go out, Ky, and see if that old villain 's hanging about. *Ky!*"

The beast took her nose out of the blanket, and seemed to implore him to reconsider his command.

"Go out and explore! Go—*once more!*" There was a curious gentle note in the weak voice.

"Don't send her out," Hildegarde pleaded. "My dog 's out there now. Poor Ky." She was conscious that her kindness for the maimed beast pleased the owner.

"Have you ever cared about a dog?" he said.

"Well, if I have n't, I know some one who has, and that 's Red's master. Why do you ask me?"

"Because I find myself with all my wealth wanting two things at the last."

"What things?"

"A little fire that I have n't strength to make, and a friend for Ky."

"I 'll help you about the fire." She reached out and picked up the fallen pieces of wood.

While she was opening her knife, "I believe," he said,

"yes, I believe you would help me about Ky—if you knew."

"Help you, how?"

He fastened his eyes on the girl's face. "Ky is one of us," he said very low.

"What do you mean?"

"Only she is better at the game."

Hildegarde leaned nearer to catch the husky words. "No one who ever braved the North, no one who ever grappled with the ice, not one of them all has done it more courageously than Ky." The shadow-ringed eyes sought the girl's again. "Nobody could be quite indifferent to Ky who cared about—who—" He broke off, exhausted by his fruitless effort to sit upright. He dropped forward on his elbows and rested his bearded chin in his hands. The tawny tide poured in streams through his fingers, and hid the horror of them. "Tomorrow," he said, with his eyes on Hildegarde, "tomorrow Ky will be the sole survivor of the only expedition that ever reached the Pole."

CHAPTER XXIV

SILENT the girl sat there. But senses less alert than the hermit's would have felt the passion of wonder that held her motionless. For all the world of difference between these two, the same light was shining in each face.

"How does the time go?" He made a movement toward his pocket, and then dropped his hand. "Curious how I still forget—I left it—" Again the motion. "Will you put your watch where I can see it?"

"Oh, go on; go on!" she urged. "My companion won't go back without me."

"Yes, you have plenty of time. But for me there 'll be barely enough," and the face that he turned an instant toward the ship— Oh, beyond doubting, his time was short!

Out of her cow-boy hat she drew a long pin, and going to the foot of the bed she thrust the hatpin several inches into the peat wall above where the dog lay. But her near presence was so resented by the great explorer, Ky, that before the watch could be hung upon the pin, Hildegarde must needs retreat. She remembered the luncheon in her pocket, and offered Ky a share. No; Ky wanted nothing of a stranger.

"Throw it down by the door," said her master, and it was done. When Hildegarde had retired, the dog came

down, and when he turned his blind eye about again, lo, a shining thing upon the wall.

"So!" the sick man sank back satisfied. "Now to get you to help me about Ky, I must put twenty years into an hour. More than twenty, for I can't remember when I began to think about finding the Pole. I played at it all my boyhood. I 've worked at it ever since." An instant Hildegarde dropped her shrinking eyes. For he was putting out that maimed hand for the cup. She heard the grate of rusty tin on the cracker-box, as his cleared voice went on, "I began by going in a revenue cutter to Port Barrow; and I had been in two arctic expeditions before the one I 'm telling you about. But on both of those others I was the one man who was n't going for the Pole. I was going for experience. I never believed my chiefs would get there, but I always believed I would—later. I had theories."

"Oh, I wish you had known a friend of ours—"

"I had a friend of my own. The year after I got back from the second voyage, I met one night, at a club in New York, a young Russian-American who was nearly as keen about polar problems as I was. We talked arctic exploration all that winter of '95 and '96. We both believed tremendously in Nansen."

"So did he—*our* friend."

"We agreed we 'd have given ten years of life to have had the honor of going along with the Norwegian. But he had been away now nearly three years. How far had he got? What had happened? Even experts began to say: 'Another expedition crushed in the arctic ice.' But neither my Russian nor I believed that Nansen was dead, and we began privately to discuss a rescue-party. We

agreed that if we carried out our idea, and if we found Nansen unsuccessful, we 'd offer him our ship to come home in and *we*—we 'd push straight on. Ours should n't be any trumpeted 'dash for the Pole'—how we loathed the cheap gallantry of the phrase!'' The voice that had flared up an instant fell again as he said: ''We knew something, even then, of the snail's pace of that laboring on; that doing battle for every yard; that nightmare of crawling forward inch by inch—only so, we knew, might a man make his 'dash for the Pole.' But the plan of setting off without saying to any one what it was we were hoping to do supplied my Russian and me with our first condition for making the attempt.''

Was it indeed only water in the cup, that after another draught of it he should seem to throw off weakness as you might a burdensome cloak? ''My friend had money, so had I. No need of a public appeal. No need to beat the big drum and talk tall. Both of us had felt the irony of each explorer's coming back to assure the world that he had never meant to find the Pole. What he had gone for was exploration of the ice-fields this side. Ha! Ha!'' It was strange that such a feeble little laugh could give out such a world of irony. ''Or else, what he 'd gone for was to ascertain the salinity of the polar seas, or to determine the trend of arctic currents. Or to explain''—again that hardly audible laughter—''how the *Jeanette's* oilskin breeches got to the Greenland coast; anything under heaven, except reaching the paltry Pole. So as we knew we were made of no better stuff, if as good, as our predecessors, we said that we, too, if we came back with only some deep sea dredgings, a few photographs of ice-pressure effects—sketches of

Aurora Borealis, and a store of polar bearskins and walrus tusks, we, too, would find ourselves pointing to these as the treasures we 'd staked life and reputation for. So hard it is to suffer the extremity and still have to say 'I failed'!"

He lay silent so long that Hildegarde quoted Cheviot. "They say it 's harder for an American."

"What is?"

"To accept defeat. Harder for us than for the others."

"Why do they say that?"

"I 've heard it 's because we make such a fetish of success." Still he lay there silent. It was as if the oil in the lamp had failed. "Yes, yours was a good plan," she said. "Even those others, the Old-World people, that they say are soberer than we—" She saw that he turned his hollow eyes toward her, listening. "If even they made excuses, and shirked saying they 'd failed—yours was the best— Oh, it was a splendid plan!"

"Are you saying we 're a nation of boasters?"

Good! that had roused him. "Do you say we are not?"

"We are everything under the sun: most vain and braggart; most discreet and self-effacing; most childish and obvious; most subtle and complex. The extreme of anything, good or evil, that 's the American." His eyes found out the tiny watch face on the peat wall. Ah, that was the tonic that was acting like a cordial mixed with magic. Right or wrong, he was under the dominion of a terror that this last flickering up of energy would fail before he had turned it to account. Even to remember

that small shining disk seemed to nerve him anew. Each look a lash. It whipped him on.

"As I 've said, my Tatar and I laid our heads together and agreed. 'For fear we fall into the old snare, we won't say we 're going at all,' not even to find Nansen, for fear we should promise too much. We would make the great attempt under the guise of a whaling expedition. My Russian had already sent out two, and had once gone along with one of them. I had spent a winter with the Samoyedes."

"What! *You* did that?" His eyes, though not his mind, took in the girl's breathless agitation. He paused, but his thoughts were too far away. "I thought only one man had ever—" began the girl trembling, and then: "Go on; go on!"

"We were both still young. Yes, six years ago I was young; and hard as a husky. But not so hard as a man need be who goes exploring in the mild climate of the drawing-room."

Hildegarde bent toward him, with wildly beating heart.

"We were just on the point of chartering our ship, when one evening—" He looked through the peat wall a thousand leagues.

"One evening—what?"

"I saw a face. A girl's soft face, but it cut the cables of my ship and set her afloat—drifting, derelict, for all I cared. A little doll's face. But it shut out everything else under the skies!"

Oh, Bella, Bella, was it yours—that face? "Go on," breathed the girl at the door.

"When her people said she should never marry a man

who might any day go off on one of these protracted voyages, I looked at the face, and I said I would never explore again.'' The glazed eyes turned to Hildegarde, but it was the old bright vision they saw, not this newer, softer presence, with wet cheeks, by the door.

''I told my Russian to draw on me for half the funds, and to find another fellow-traveler. But she was too young to marry, they said. We must wait a year. I said I would wait. When the year was half gone, I was in London—because the face was there.'' Still looking through the wall he groped for the cup. Hildegarde rose, and put it in his hands. Oh poor, poor hands! No need to turn shuddering away. They were softly wrapped from her sight in a mist of pitiful tears.

He gave her back the cup. ''We had been to a skating party,'' he said. Something grotesque conjured by the contrast of that light phrase wafted out of a butterfly world to fall in such a place at such an hour made for the unreality, not of far-off London, nor of parties where pretty ladies play at being in a world of ice—the conjuration merely lifted the dim hut and its wild occupant into the realm of the phantasmagoric. The girl saw all in a wavering dimness, shot dazzlingly with splinters of sunshine. But the man went on in that level tone: ''I remember her saying it was the first party given in London on artificial ice—an absurd affair. But she said: 'Was n't it nice of me to get you an invitation, too? It will seem quite like going to your horrid North Pole.' ''

How plain Bella's voice sounded in the room. That was why he was smiling. Bella could always bring that look into the eyes of men.

"I said, 'quite like the North Pole.' And I went and skated with her. Afterward, at the door, I had just seen her and her mother into the carriage, when my eye fell on the orange-colored bill of the 'Pall Mall Gazette.' And three words printed there blared out like trumpets.

'NEWS FROM NANSEN.'

'He 's found it!' I said to myself—'Nansen 's found the Pole!' and I could have flung up my hat and cried hurrah in the sober street. As I called to the newsboy I was ashamed of my voice. I thought people would notice how it shook. When I pulled my hand out of my pocket it trembled so I dropped the coin and it rolled away into the street. The boy ran after it, and I damned him for his pains. 'Never mind! Give me a paper!' I called out. But the boy ran on. As I stood there waiting for him to disentangle himself from the traffic and come back, I seemed to live a lifetime. How had he done it, that splendid fellow, Nansen? What had it been like? Well, soon I should know. The knowledge that had cost so much, soon I should have it in my hand —for a penny! The awful majesty of the upper regions fell away."

With a growing excitement painfully the sick man lifted himself up. "It was then," he said, "then—a queer thing happened." He seemed to wait for something. Turning to the girl, "You see, this was the moment I 'd been living for in a way."

"Of course; of course."

"And yet, now that it had come, my spirit had gone

down like the sounding lead on a deep-sea bottom. I stood there in the street with a sense of unmitigable loss. Something so sudden and acute that I did n't myself understand at first what was going on in me. For it was something quite apart from any feeling that I 'd like to have been the one to do the thing. There had been for months no question of that. No. It was just a poignant realization that almost the last of the jealous old world's secrets had been forced out of her keeping. This thing that men had dreamed about before ever they 'd girdled the globe—it was no more the stuff of dreams. The thought of Captain Cook and Franklin flashed across my mind, and I remembered the men of the *Jeanette*. But it was n't till I remembered the men unborn that I measured the full extent of the disaster. The generations to come would never know what it had stood for—this goal the Norwegian had won. They would n't have to spend even a penny to hear all about it. It would be thrust at them, this shining and terrible thing men had died to gain—one leaden fact the more, conned in a heavy book, stripped to the lean dimensions of a date! Discovery of America, discovery of the Pole—who thrills over these things when they are done? And now the newsboy was coming slowly back, rubbing the mud off my half-crown. In a second I should be reading how the last great stronghold of wonder was destroyed. 'Well, the world 's grown poorer!' I said to myself, and I counted my change, thinking less of Nansen's news than of those men of the future. He had taken from them the finest playground ever found for the imagination—the last great field for grim adventuring.

"I opened the paper and read that Nansen had turned back before reaching the eighty-seventh parallel.

"The Pole was still to be found."

Ah, Bella, when you saw that look go traveling so far, so far, you must have known that he would follow. Poor little Bella!

Under those vision-filled eyes, the crippled dog, still sleeping, made a muffled sound. "Ky is dreaming," said the sick man, absently, "that she hears a seal crying 'Ho-o-o,' with his nose above the ice. Or she thinks she hears the 'Kah! kah! sah! sah!' of the auks. So do I, sometimes."

"But you promised 'the face' you would n't think of the arctic any more."

"Yes," and weakness of the flesh or weight of memory held him a moment silent. "She always said that if the Norwegian had been successful she and I would never have quarreled. She wrote that in every letter after I left her. I don't know. She was very young. She never understood"—he glanced at Hildegarde—"never understood what was the most interesting place on the map. She thought it was Paris." He smiled. "Maybe she was right. I don't know. All I do know is"—and a subtle animation invaded voice and air—"a few weeks after I read Nansen's news in the London street, Borisoff came across from Christiana to talk things over. All this time that I had been looking at the face he had been building a ship as good, he said, as the *Fram*. No man would dare say more. He had made agreements with a crew and company of picked men, some of them his old whaling people. He had news that the Finlander

we 'd sent the year before to Siberia, after Olenek dogs, would be waiting with the pack up there on that bleak shore, between Chelyuskin and the Kara Sea—'waiting for you and me,' said Borisoff.'' The sick man's eyes were shining. ''Borisoff was a tremendous fellow! I never knew but one person who did n't believe in Borisoff. You could n't expect a girl—'' he broke off. ''But the great bond between him and me was that we both had that passion for the North, that is like nothing else on earth in the way of land love. Talk of the South! A man loves the South as he loves a soft bed and the warm corner by the fire. But he loves the North as he loves his prey.'' He brought one hand away from his beard and he fastened it afresh in the knotted oilskin at his side, with an air of one about to rise up and continue his journey. ''Well, one day I said to Borisoff, 'Of course *we* can't do the damned thing if Nansen could n't —so come along, and let 's try!'

''We sailed from Tromsö that July.

''But we did n't call ourselves arctic explorers, and we never once said Pole—not even after we reached the edge of the ice-pack, north of Sannikof Island. It was n't till we got into north latitude 78° that we called a council of war. By that time we knew our men and they knew us. We were sure of six, but we put it to the other four as well. We engaged to extricate the ship from the floe and send her home, if any man of them wanted to turn back. What were Borisoff and I going to do? one of the doubtful four asked. Well, we had our famous steel launch, and we had sledges, dogs, kyacks, provisions, and—we had—an idea we 'd like to see what it was like—*farther on.* I 've always believed our not

saying anything about 'a dash,' or so much as naming the great goal, gave Borisoff's words their most compelling eloquence. If we 'd said then that we wanted to try for the Pole, some one would have felt himself obliged to object and talk prudence. As it was, we twelve sat there as one man in the little saloon of the *Narwhal,* with the loose ice grinding against the ship's sides. And no one said, but every one was thinking, 'We 'll find the Pole.' Borisoff was a born leader. Not a soul on the ship but believed Borisoff would do anything he set out to do. They all knew by now how extraordinarily well equipped we were. Borisoff showed again and again how we should profit by the failure of our forerunners. Well, that was in September. We were frozen in, and we drifted with the ice all that winter and following summer—drifted in the dark, with bears prowling round the ice-shrouded ship—drifted in the midnight sun with guillemots and fulmars circling about our rigging."

He sat there some seconds staring through the peat wall, never seeing the open watch, forgetting the irrevocable hour. As though she, too, shared in some chill vision, the dog shivered.

To bring the master back, "Ky is cold," said Hildegarde, and would have thrown over her a trailing end of blanket.

"No, no, she 's not cold *here,*" the sick man answered, but in a voice so faint and far Hildegarde wondered if he would ever speak again.

To mask her creeping fear and bridge the silence, "Why does she shiver, if she 's not cold?"

His absent eyes came slowly back to where the dog was uneasily dozing. "Thinks we 're crossing the ice-

moraines, thinks she can't go on, then remembers the whip. The whip that flies out when you least expect it, eh, Ky?—and bites the hair off clean." He bent forward, and gently laid his distorted hands on the scarred and trembling hide. The dog was quiet again.

"That first winter," he went on, "one of our men was killed by a bear, and one died from a natural cause. He would have died at home. Early in the summer came the day when the ice gripped us. Our tough ship might have been an egg-shell. But we were ready."

"You had to abandon her?"

He gave a short nod. "Sledges out on the ice away from the pressure area, packed, and kyack-loaded. We had kept the dogs in condition by short journeys, and we knew they were as splendid animals for work as they were terrible for fighting. We could n't prevent them from tearing each other to pieces, but between whiles they carried us on. Eh, Ky? You carried us on, for you carried our means of life. Or maybe we carried you, with our whips and clubs and curses. It 's horrible to look back, that 's why I do it, to save Ky any more—" His eyes implored the dumb creature's pardon. "Those days and months of forcing the dwindled pack over the pressure ridges!—and when the patient beasts stopped from sheer exhaustion, shouting at them till our own voices tore our nerves and burst our very ear-drums, hardening our hearts, beating the splendid animals, till they lay down one by one on those desolate ice-plains and died. Well, well, well,"—he made sure of the bundle again,—"the dogs had the best of it. *We* blood-marked many a mile of the polar ice, we stumbled from floe to floe, we stormed the pressure ridges, and

when the teams had dwindled and the ice opened in long reaches, we took the remaining dogs into our canvas boats and along the water lanes we sailed and sailed."

"To the Pole? You *did* find the—"

"Lord!" he interrupted, "finding the Pole is n't a patch on hunting for it! That 's what the men of the future will never know. You can read the kind of thing we went through in any arctic book. You can read it all, and then know nothing about it. We did impossible things—things any man will say he can't do. And then he does them because he must, and because human endurance is the one miracle left in the world."

An instant he stopped for breath. "Good men, all our fellows. But their bones are up yonder. Good dogs, too. Ky 's the one that 's left."

There was a long silence in the dim little room.

"But you reached the Pole, Borisoff and you!"

Slowly he shook his wild head. "Not Borisoff." There was silence for a while.

"It must have been very horrible for you when he—"

"Yes," said the sick man, and Hildegarde saw the mouth set harder yet under the tawny cloud. "The day he died we came upon a great piece of timber frozen aslant in the ice. Borisoff had been queer, wandering all those last days. But that great shaft that had come from some land where the trees grow glorious and tall, the sight of it excited him so that it cleared his head. He said it was Siberian spruce, and had come from his own forests of the Yenisei. And he talked about the currents that had carried it so far—talked rationally. We found initials carved on one end: 'F. N.—H.' If ever there had been more the record was frayed out of

existence by the timber catapulting against the ice. 'I 'll rest here,' Borisoff had said, and''—a long time seemed to go by—''I 've no doubt he rests well. Splendid fellow, Borisoff.

''The next day I cut his name on the great log, and I went on alone.''

''You and Ky!''

He nodded. ''Ky and the dogs that were left, fighting our way over the ice-moraines in a hard, fierce light, that seemed to come from every point of the compass at once. I remember a curious optical delusion overtook me. I lost all faculty of seeing the snow-covered ice I walked on. I could feel it, of course, at every step. I could see my snow-shoes sharp as if they 'd been silhouettes poised in air. But the terrible white light that bathed the universe seemed to be flooding up from under my feet as well as beating on my head. Round that white bossed shield of the frozen sea the sun moved in his shrunken circle, with no uprising and no setting, abhorring shadow. Like that, day and night, night and day.''

''For how long?''

''For a thousand years. A dog killed to feed the rest, and still on, 'for miles on miles on miles of desolation—leagues on leagues on leagues, without a change.' In a world as dead and white as leprosy.'' He closed his eyes, as if the midnight glare still dazzled him.

In her sleep again the dog had been moving and moaning.

''Ky is in pain,'' said the girl, very softly, hardly daring to whisper.

The sick man opened his eyes and faintly shook his

head. "Only dreaming. I do the same myself. Wake in the dark, and think the pressure has sent the ice towering above us. And while we try to get across the broken blocks, suddenly they begin to grind and growl and to writhe and thunder, as if moved to hatred of us. Ky lost a yoke-fellow in such a place, crushed between the shrieking boulders. Quiet, Ky! The exploring 's all done. At least"—he looked up—"I 'd like to think—"

"You may."

"Thank you," said the sick man.

"Yes, Ky," Hildegarde spoke with a little break in her voice. "The exploring 's all done." As if the dog had heard and comprehended, and so been delivered from evil dreams, she got up, came shakily down from the bed, and stood for a moment at the door, looking out.

"What 's ahead of us, Ky?" he asked, dreamily. "An ice sky or a water sky?"

"How was it you could tell?"

"Oh, you learn. The field-ice reflection is the brightest, a little yellow; drift ice, purer white; new ice, gray. And where there 's open water the 'blink' is slatey, is n't it, Ky? Or blue, like the skies of California."

"But the Pole?" The word brought a startled look into his face, and his eyes guarded the threshold so fiercely she sunk her voice to meet his humor. "What was it like?" she whispered.

"Ky knows," he answered, warily. "Ky got there."

With a supreme humility, or was it a high indifference on her part, the great explorer crossed the threshold and sat outside in the sun.

"I 've wondered about it a good deal, as I 've lain here," said the sick man. "It almost seems as if nothing

in the world-scheme were so precious as suffering. Men feel that when they recall their early hardships. Dimly they see that nothing they 've found later was of such value to them. Yes, yes, beside, the days of the struggle the days of the harvest are dull. And it 's this''—he crouched over the oilskin, and dropped his voice—''this incentive to the greatest struggle that men can embark upon—this is the Great Legacy I shall leave behind!''

''But what,'' she pointed to the thing he was hugging between gaunt arms, ''what is in that?''

''*The proofs,*'' he whispered, and started when the word was out. It seemed to Hildegarde that he held the weather-beaten bundle tighter still, and still he put off telling what she wanted most to know. As if he could n't bring himself, after all, to yield the secret up. ''Think,'' he whispered. ''We could set the world ringing with it, Ky. Only we must n't.''

''Yes, yes, but you must!'' Hildegarde half started to her feet.

''No. Not after— I swore an oath, you see.''

''To—''

That motion of the wild head: ''The One up yonder.''

CHAPTER XXV

"WHAT One up yonder?" Hildegarde's voice was as hushed as his own.

"Kyome."

"Who is that?"

"The god of the unknown North. Had n't you heard that in all the old lands, from Greece to Mexico, there was always an altar to the unknown god?"

She nodded.

"When men in their foolishness threw down those temples, the old gods fled to the farther countries. Last of all to the world's waste places." He held up one horrible hand, and made a grotesque motion of "Come nearer."

She obeyed.

"The greatest of these gods of the unknown—he sat on a throne of ice at the top of the world. The others—they had found no rest from the men of the West. Behind the Great Wall of China we hunted them out. We forced our way to them through Japan ports. We let the garish day into the dim temples of Korea, and the gold terraces of holy Lhasa are trod by alien feet. But the uttermost North was all inviolate till I came. I made the kingdom mine. But now"—he lifted the maimed right hand like one taking oath—"now I abdicate. I will destroy my title-deeds. Fire! a little fire!"

His hands fumbled among the shavings in the blanket, and feverishly he caught up the knife.

"No, no. Let me," she said. "I 'll do it for you. See, I can split the kindling straight down." She strained to make good the boast. "Just a moment! Oh, but this kind of wood is tough! What is it? Not a piece of drift—so flat and smooth?"

"Piece of a broken skee—my snow-shoe." While she forced the sharp blade down, he was calling out, "Ky! D' you hear that fellow laughing at us?"

The dog turned obedient, and both her pointed ears seemed to be pricking at the silence.

"Whenever I begin to hope, I hear that walrus guffaw." Ky's master was listening with all his shrinking soul, and his eyes looked straight through the wall, but he spoke as quietly as before. Hildegarde shivered a little. Death itself could hardly remove him further than he had wandered in those few seconds. "Oh, come back!" she said in her heart, and then aloud, "Tell me, please tell me, how I shall manage about Ky?"

"Ky?" His eyelids fluttered as he obeyed the call.

"Yes, how am I to make her follow me?"

"Give her more of your pilot bread."

"Will she leave you at the last for that?"

"She won't know it 's the last, and she is hungry. Are n't you, Ky?"

Hildegarde laid down the knife an instant, took a fragment from her pocket and held it out to the dog.

Very doubtfully Ky came nearer. But still she could n't make up her mind to trust the new friend's hand. So Hildegarde laid the coveted morsel down.

When Ky had cautiously snapped it up, she hobbled

to the bedside and turned her dim eyes to the old familiar bundle.

"Yes, I 've got it safe." He circled it with an arm, still looking down at the dog.

Would he ever let it go of his own free will? What vain notion was this of a fire!

Now he was muttering absently, as he smoothed the oilskin: "Our harvest, yours and mine. Whatever we went through in the sowing, it was all nothing, was n't it, Ky?—just nothing to bringing the harvest home."

"It was n't possible for coming to be worse than going!"

"Borisoff would have said no. But Borisoff only tried one way. *We* know—Ky and I." In the pause the eyelids closed over lusterless eyes. It was only while he spoke of the journey that he seemed alive. As she looked again at the face, as blank and cold as a grate without a fire, horror fell upon her lest he should die before Cheviot came back.

Hildegarde's little store of splinters and shavings had grown into a heap. "If I make kindling for the fire, I deserve to be told—things—don't I? Besides, then I can tell her—the face."

"How could you do that?"

She must break it gradually. "Would n't it be possible for me to find her out and tell her?"

He looked at Hildegarde dreamily an instant. "I wonder," he said.

"I 'll do it, if only you 'll go on—go on."

He made a faint "no," with the wild head, smiling dimly. "Any one may have a nightmare. No one has ever told a nightmare, so it did n't sound absurd. It 's

a thing you can't pass on, fortunately. You can't recover it even for yourself. Of all those last weeks, only three things stand out clear: one was the day I saw the first fox track in the snow."

"You were glad of that?"

"Glad of the first sign of life?"

"And the second thing?"

"The day when I looked south and saw the sky was yellow."

"What did that mean?"

"Land. All the rest 's a blur. And in the blur two shadows—Ky and I, on the homeward journey—the journey that I knew even then would n't end at home. Ky and I. All our companions dead. The last dog, even our infinitesimal rations of pemmican, gone. Everything gone, but Ky and my title-deeds."

"I don't see how you bore it—how you kept alive."

"*I* don't know. Later we fed on the small crustaceans in the ice-channels, then the narwhal. But in the strain I think my wits went. Mercifully I can't recover much in that blur of agony till the moment that stands out clear as conflagration in the dark—that moment when I set our course by the shadow my staff cast, and saw—" He dropped his hollow jaw, staring at some horror unspeakable.

"What was it you—"

"I saw that while we were stumbling blindly toward the blessed South—faster still the ice that we were on was drifting north."

"Carrying you back to—"

"*Back to the Pole.*"

Her fingers lost their hold upon the knife.

He did n't even notice that she was no longer keeping her part of the compact. "Talk of Sisyphus! Talk of torture! Ky and I, like half-frozen flies crawling over the roof of the world, while the greater forces carried us calmly back to the North! It remains burnt into my memory as the final type of hopeless human striving. Each day I would read the message of the shadow on the ice, till I began to say to myself: the penalty for having reached the Pole is that you must stay there. No use to struggle. You are surrounded, captured, brought back. The spirit of the violated place won't allow a man to carry his victory home. It was then I understood." Palm across palm he laid his fumbling hands, but his faint-moving lips brought no sound forth.

"You prayed?"

"Prayed? Something of the sort. I made a vow. By the unknown god I swore if I were allowed to get back alive no soul should ever know—except just one among all the living. Strange it should be you!"

"Of course you were thinking of little—of—"

"Yes. I 'd tell nobody, I swore, but a girl. I meant a girl with a little doll face—a girl who would n't understand. Our national phrase for any sort of success kept running in my head. I still felt I 'd like her to know I had n't failed 'to get there.' Foolishness, of course. What I really wanted was that she should have a share in that vision no man's eyes but mine had seen. I meant to show her these."

It was terrible to see his hands trying to undo the treasure. But while again she hacked at the unyielding wood, Hildegarde followed fascinated each grotesque move the sick man made. At last the tight-drawn knots

had yielded. Between the four corners of the ancient oilskin, creased and twisted and stained, the harvest of John Galbraith's life lay open in the hollow between his knees. Hildegarde stood up with knife caught in a cleft of the skee, staring. He turned over the little hoard of discolored papers that lay on a flat chart-box, a theodolite, a pocket sextant, and a record cylinder.

"Notes, sketches, tables of temperature and magnetic variation, casual phenomena. Oh, I found out strange secrets! The whole story 's here. I 'd sooner have left my bones up yonder than not bring her back the proofs." He opened out the chart and hung over the grimy, tattered sheet as though it were some work of art triumphant—a perfection of beauty unimagined in the world before. As he sat there hugging the shabby heap between his knees, you would have thought that stained and sea-soaked store must be splendid with color, or resonant with the organ music of the deep and of great winds harping in the waste—fit record of a pilgrimage no soul had made before.

"In my heart," he said, "I hoped, when I took her these, she might, at last, realize—"

A torn and dirty book, with corners worn round and curling, and a look about its tough, discolored pages as though it had come down a thousand years. "My diary." He turned a page. "She could n't have read it, would n't want so much as to touch it. Still, it was for her that even at the last I carried it rather than food."

Opening the other side of the shallow chart-box that was fitted with grooves in which sheets of stout drawing-paper were slipped and firmly held in place, he drew

what that first glance seemed to reveal as a meaningless smudge of violent color. *"There it is!"* and no sooner had he said the words, than nervously he was sheltering the thing behind one knee. "You are sure that old fellow is n't hanging about?"

She glanced out. "Quite sure."

Cautiously he brought the paper up from its moment's hiding, but his low voice dropped to a deeper register, *"That 's what it 's like!"*

From the hoarse triumph in the tone she knew that however clear before his actual eyes had been once this picture in his hand, they saw it now no more.

"That 's what Borisoff and the rest died to have a glimpse of. This is what I found, instead of the palæocrystic sea. Here is where the ice-hills rise. There 'd been a storm. The low cloud-masses—they were incredible! Like that! And the zenith clear, except for the banners of light."

Plain he had no guess that the colored crayon was both marred and bettered; that the picture he had set down, with some fair skill, had been less moving, less poetic, even less true than this, that chance had wrought with a blind but faithful artistry. For as Hildegarde stared at the prismatic haze, a kind of wild meaning dawned there upon the paper. Yes, surely, chance had craftier hands than any but the greatest among the sons of men. For the picture brought that almost religious conviction of the truth that great art gives. Just so, and no otherwise, must this thing have been. The dome of the sky up yonder was an inverted bowl of brass. And in the heavenward hollow of it a giant brood of serpents flamed and writhed above a wild white waste,

warmed here with violet, cooled there with silver and pearl.

"And that," she said, only to have assurance of his voice again, "that 's what the world is like up there?"

"Do you think men go so far, and walk through hell, to bring home a lie?"

Looking no longer at the orgy of color on the paper, but at the reflection of the actual scene in the dying face, "It was like the Day of Judgment," said the girl.

"You can see that!" The craftsman's pleasure in his handiwork brought out a gleam, and then, with a sudden passion, he tore the paper across and across, while Hildegarde cried out:

"Ah, don't! Let me take it to—her!"

"Take it to the fire!—and leave the great legacy unencumbered. Fire, fire!" He was gathering up the splinters and shavings that he had whittled from the skee in the hours before Hildegarde's coming. "Here! Here!"

A sense of impotency shackled her spirit as well as lamed her tongue. Blindly she took the fragments over to the embrasure of some blackened stones, just inside and to windward of the threshold.

"No one is about?"

"No one."

"This is to start it, then." He held out something. "This will catch easiest."

"I have some thin paper here." She twisted a wisp of her own map of the North, with a vague instinct of putting off an evil hour.

But the sick man followed with eager eyes the laying of every crosswise stick, his gaunt frame huddled over

his treasure while he watched the making of the sacrificial fire that should devour it. If his eyes left Hildegarde's hands a moment, it was only that they might guard the door against surprise.

Once again, "Look out," he said, "and see—"

"There 's no one. But would n't you *like* somebody to come in? Some face out of the past—"

"To come *now!*"

"Some one who could bring you news of—that girl you—"

"Remember wood 's worth more than gold up here! Keep a little back."

"Keep some back?"

"Paper like this burns slow. As you say some one might interrupt—" No hospitality in the look he sent to the door. "Before you light it, have everything over there, ready to feed the fire." His thin arms gathered up the store. Ky growled uneasily as Hildegarde drew near, the girl wondering what was best for Galbraith's peace, what was of any avail.

He made a motion to give her all he held, but what he actually handed over was the torn crayon, and even in the act of giving up that he set one fragment against another, looking his last.

"Oh, keep it—let me keep it—for her. Could you bear to hear—"

But that mysterious arctic current, about which the greatest geographers are not agreed, it had carried him back again to the Pole! With vacant eyes on the colored paper, "We left him a feather for his ice-cap, did n't we, Ky?"

"A feather."

"Or a ribbon. Did n't you see?"

"See—?"

"This. You did n't notice we planted the stars and stripes there?"

"Oh-h. You see I thought you said no one was ever to know—"

"—and I carved a B. on the flagstaff. It was Borisoff's snow-shoe staff. But the B.—it did n't stand for Borisoff."

"No?"

"No. The bamboo stood up there so light and slender—" Again the look that only one remembrance could bring into his eyes.

"It must have seemed like Bella upholding our country's flag."

His whole face warmed into smiling. The death shadows fled for that moment of his saying, "Had I told you her name? Yes, I brought the record cylinder away, and left there only something that would perish."

"You make a fetish of that oath you swore!"

"It is n't because of the oath. Why should I take an empty fame out of the world with me? Should I rest the better?"

"You think only of yourself. But there 's the gain to science. What right have you to deprive the world of that?"

He smiled. "You speak like a green girl, or like a newspaper. Forgive me! But you don't realize. The gain to science is the by-product. The true gain is to the human soul. You don't believe me? Read the most inspiring books ever written about the arctic."

"Perhaps I have. Who wrote them?"

"Franklin, Greely, and De Long—the three who failed. Here 's to them!" He lifted up the cup, emptied it, and dropped it with a ringing of rusty tin, an eye cleared and preternaturally bright. "In the past it was all different, you know. Enough and to spare in the physical world to be conquered. But the things to be conquered in the future, do you know what they are?"

Voiceless she shook her head.

"Moral weakness and physical self-indulgence. In America we are all so comfortable we are all like to be damned!"

She could have wept aloud to hear the half-whimsical, half-delirious tone of the wreck upon the camp-bed deprecating comfort.

"If Borisoff had lived—I don't know. But Borisoff is sleeping in the lee of that great shaft of Siberian pine, and I—if I know anything in the hereafter, I shall be glad that I left the hope behind me for other men."

"Left it for some new Norse Viking maybe, or some sea-faring Briton. And America will never know—"

" 'Sh. I 'm not sure whether I 'm more sorry that America should n't know she was first at the goal, or whether I 'm not more proud that it should be an American who wins the race and refrains from making the world resound with it. That it should be an American, after all, to do just that. One, too,"—he smiled with a curious sweetness,—"one as guilty of boasting as his brothers are. So you see I keep some spark of vanity to light me—out. Here!" He gathered the hoard in his arms an instant, and held it half-hidden under his beard.

But it seemed as hard for him to loose his arms from about his treasure as for a mother to part from her child.

Hildegarde made a tender, half-unconscious motion of protecting both the broken man and the toys his dying hands still clung to. But he, not comprehending, said faintly: "I 've carried this little bundle of papers across the crown of the world to—to give it to a strange woman at last!"

"No, no." She fell on her knees by the bed. "I am not strange! I am Hildegarde."

His blazing eyes looked over her bowed head at the little heap among the blackened stones. "Here!" he whispered.

"What 's this?"

"A wind-match. Careful! there 's only one more."

She rose unsteadily, with a sense of the utter uselessness of any help now for this man who had been Jack Galbraith. But as she struck the match, and the fire caught among the sticks, once more the life leaped up in the man. He sat erect, exultant, horrible to look upon, tearing the leaves of a book, holding them up in sheaves, and crying out: "Here, take the rest! I keep my word. I give the Kingdom back to the oldest of the gods!" And with that he fell together and lay with eyes hidden, breathing hoarsely.

When she saw that the last pages, not even smoldering any more, lay charred among the stones, she turned again to the bedside. Was he dead? A long time she stood there. What sound was that above the surf? Again the long shrilling note. She went to the door. Again! Of course; the steam whistle of the *Beluga*, calling the travelers back. And this other traveler, had he

heard a call? Was he, too, gone home? With trembling knees she made her way back to the low bed. Again the strident sound. It set the nerves a-shake. Painfully the gaunt figure moved. It lifted up its face. It sent little-seeing eyes to the stony altar. They seemed to search among the ashes.

Again the wind bore over the water that harsh summons to be gone. "Everything is burned," said the girl, and with a little strangled cry of "Bella! Bella!" Hildegarde buried her face in her hands, sobbing: "Oh, I think I was mad to help you. I 'm sorry. I 'm sorry."

"I 'm glad."

She dropped her hands.

"Glad . . . have n't spoiled . . . finest game in the world . . . the men who come after. Don't know—what they 'll do—when they 've found it—but—hunting the Pole—will last them . . . good while yet. Ky—won't tell!"

Again the *Beluga's* piercing call.

It carried Hildegarde to the door. Where was any counsel? Where was Cheviot? Ah, yes! From the heights behind the hut, he must have made the signal agreed on before leaving the *Beluga.* Hildegarde could see the small boat putting off now from the whaler. What was she to do? If, after Cheviot's promise, there were delay, whc could doubt the choleric captain would not scruple to leave his undesired passengers behind. Or if there were only threat of that—her father's bewilderment and misery. What to do! As she turned her eyes away from the shining world without the door, her dazzled vision found only shadows in the hut. She had dreamed it all! No; that voice again: "—Still heels four

degrees to starboard! One point? No; only a motion of the floe in azimuth. I tell you we 're locked fast."

"Please listen. I 'm Bella's friend. I—oh, come back a moment."

"Tell Borisoff—can't hear with this infernal shrieking of the boulders. By the Lord!"—he raised himself on an elbow—"ten yards of this living, moving ice would hold Goliath back. And it 's sixty miles to the sea!"

She turned her wet face to the door again. The tossing boat out yonder seemed to go down before her eyes.

"Don't let any one in!"

"No, no." There it was again, like a toy boat dancing wildly before destruction.

"What I mind most," the faint voice whispered, "is not holding out till—I got across to Alaska. All those months—all that sacrifice—all that suffering—and fail in such a little thing!"

"Why," interrupted the girl, "why did you want to get to Alaska?"

"Why? I—I don't seem to remember. There *was* a reason. But it 's too far."

"You don't mean—"

"I shall never get there now. Do you hear the music, Ky?"

"The music?"

"Screaming of the ptarmigan. Music to us, was n't it?" In a changed voice, rational, but weak: "I can't see you, Ky."

"She 's here, with me, at the door."

"Then she 's dim as she used to be when she plodded on in front, wrapped in her cloud of frost-smoke."

"Please try to listen. I—see the sailors bringing the little boat through the surf."

"That 's easy. Let 'em try the ice!"

"They 're coming for me."

"You—you?"

"You don't remember."

"Yes, I do."

"I am—"

"Ky's friend. Thank you." Feebly he put out his hand. But he would have drawn it back, if hers had not closed trembling over it.

"Oh, Jack! Jack!" she cried to herself, conscious of an anguished impulse to hide the marred hands in her breast to see if pity might not heal them!

"I think whatever comes of it," she said brokenly, "I must n't go."

The glazed eyes looked at her in faint wonder.

"Because I am Hildegarde."

"That was n't her name."

"No, no. I am *Hildegarde Mar.*"

"A nice name."

"But you 've heard it before."

"Hildegarde—?" The faintest motion of the wild head making "No."

"Yes, yes." She was on her knees by the bed. "My father was your friend. My father is Nathaniel Mar."

He said nothing for a moment. She thought he was trying to coördinate the memories her words recalled. But when he spoke it was to say, "No one must know but Bella—only Bella in all the world."

"Only Bella," said the girl, and rose upright. But through her tears she saw that his lips still moved.

"Will you—" he whispered. She bent down again to catch the words. "Will you stand at the door—till the boat is beached?"

Hoping, with a catch at the heart, that old association dimly stirred by the name Mar had brought him some warmth of her presence in this chill hour, she tried to find a voice to ask why he wanted her to wait those few poor minutes at the door. But she had no need to put the question. His eyes made answer, trying to follow Ky, as the dog left the threshold and went with her slow, halting gait, aimless, half across the little strip of tundra to the sea.

"Don't say—anything to me. And don't"—the wild face twitched with pain—"*don't look at me.* Just—stand there, with Ky—till the boat 's ready. And when you go—don't speak." Again the dimming eyes sought on the tundra for that vague shadow that was his fellow-explorer and his friend. "I shall watch you, Ky—till the whaler—takes you—South."

As Hildegarde, bending lower, tried to form speech with her quivering lips, "No," he whispered. "You 've done—all—you—can. All, but this last thing. I 'd like—to see her as long as ever—But don't speak, and—*don't—look—back.*"

His eyes went past the girl, went straining after the dog, as though Ky were in truth as dim to-day as on that gray morning when he saw her first, standing in front of the pack, wrapped in mist, nose to the north, waiting for him "up yonder" by the Kara shore.

Out there, on the tundra edge again, the great explorer, Ky, stood like some old coastguard reading the signs of the sea.

Behind, at the door of the hut, Hildegarde Mar. But though the girl, too, looked straight across the surf, toward the islands named for those in the Adriatic after

the Argive king, what she saw was not the nearer Diomede and not the little boat fighting its way through the surf; not even her lover running along the shore and looking among the high-piled rocks; not John Galbraith, dying behind her there in the shadow. Clearer than if she 'd held it in her hand, she saw the colored crayon sketch that lay charred among the ashes. So it was like that!—the terrible, beautiful place that would still go luring men with its lying legend on all the maps, crying out in every tongue in Europe—

UNEXPLORED REGION!

COME AND FIND ME!

CHAPTER XXVI

AT last! After fruitless, heart-sickening search among the boulders, Cheviot had caught sight of Hildegarde breasting easily the risen wind, stepping lightly and without the least inconvenience down from the tundra to the beach. Over the rocks he came running, making signals for haste. Red, too, a long way behind, went racing along the shore, back and forth, barely out of the spray; running seaward when the breakers retreated, fleeing from them on their return, howling at the sailors as they bent over their oars, hardly fifty yards from the foam-line.

Hildegarde made her way blindly, stumbling among stones, scattering bits of pilot bread in her wake, and casting backward looks.

"Hurry! Hurry!" Cheviot was shouting.

"She 's so lame!" Hildegarde could n't hear his next words, but she caught the quick gesture of one who reproachfully reminds himself. And he was flying forward to her aid.

"I 'm all right—but the dog—"

Without slackening pace, a hand at either side of his mouth, he called: "They can't hold the boat in that surf."

"Ky—the dog—"

"Red 's all right. He 's there." Louis was near

enough now for her to see the heat of the race in his face as he called out: "The captain will be furious—" The rest was caught away by the wind, till quite near: "I 'll pull you along. Here, catch hold of my hand."

"Oh, Louis, I 've got something to tell—"

"—ankle giving out again?"

"No, not that."

He turned sharply to signal the sailors that the lady would be there in time.

"Louis!"

"Don't waste breath! Come on!"

"Something 's happened. It 's about Jack Galbraith."

Had he heard? What was he going to do? It had n't occurred to her so much as to wonder before. Did he think there was no hurry about this news she had picked up concerning the long-lost traveler, or had the wind carried the name away? Or—"

"I must tell you about it, Louis. Wait a moment!"

"You 're asking the tide to wait!" And far from gently his own momentum was carrying her on. Was there then one service he would refuse her? Well—well—she steeled herself. He could n't refuse to take the dog in any case.

"We—we can't go so fast."

"Yes, we can. We 've got to."

"No. I must wait for—the dog."

A flying look of astonishment sent over shoulder shot from her to Ky. "*That* dog?" But impatience drove even wonderment out. "Can't you see how close—" He flung an arm toward the laboring boat, as with hot face turned seaward to the wind he hurried on.

"If the dog goes back he 'll think I failed him—" The wind and the surf took the rest. In the turmoil of her mind the first thing needful to assure seemed to be Ky's safe conveyance to the ship. While Louis, without slackening speed, snatched her arm through his, compelling her to keep his pace, still the girl looked back as she held behind her the last of the lure. Ky was making her way better than her new friend, for Hildegarde's weakened ankle turned more than once, and now she was almost down. Cheviot had swung back and had her on her feet again.

"Louis—" But the pain had turned her faint.

"It 's horrible to hurt you, but there may n't be another boat this year," he jerked out, starting on again.

Hildegarde had no real fear of their being left. Was n't "the watchman" with her? But Ky! The sailors might refuse to wait for a dog.

"Here!" He shook off her slack hand and grasped her by the arm. "I must help you more."

"Yes, yes. Help me to get her down there in time."

"All right!" But he was shouting the reassuring words across the surf. "Come on!" he encouraged the sailors. "Coming on" was easier said than done. An instant the boat had fallen back.

"We 'll be there as soon as you!" Cheviot's shout dropped hoarsely: "We won't if you can't do better than this."

"You 'll have to tell father—"

"If you stop to talk we 'll simply be left behind."

Ah, well, if he took it like that, why should she go any further with him? "You 'd better hurry on with the

"Hildegarde's ankle turned more than once, and now she was almost down"

dog," she said. "Tell father he must manage somehow to come."

"Are you out of your head!" He seemed to be carrying her forward without volition of hers. She offered no physical resistance but, "I 'm not coming with you to the ship," she said. "I 've got to go back."

"Go where, for God's sake?"

"Back to the hut."

"Go—what for?"

"Because Jack Galbraith is there." For just an instant his fingers slackened hold. The shadow of a fear she had never seen in those clear eyes darkened the fine candor of his face, and then, with firmer grasp, he was once more hurrying her on.

"I 'm not going crazy. It 's sober truth. Louis, Louis, what are we to do?"

"Prevent that boat from leaving us behind."

"Ah, you don't care! It 's nothing to you!"

The hand on her arm tightened in such a grip she could hardly keep from crying out with the pain of it, but faster than ever the two were flying along the stony beach.

"Oh Louis, help me!" she said passionately, and holding back by main force she brought down the pace. "You would n't want me to—oh, tell me what 's to be done!"

"I don't know." Suddenly all that energy of his seemed spent. "Perhaps nothing can be done."

She had never before seen hopelessness in his face. It pierced through all her preoccupation and excitement. "Yes, yes, something can be done. You need n't take it as you 're doing. Oh, Louis, don't you see, *you* might go back."

"*I?*" He looked at her with eyes that made her draw a breath of pain. "It is true," he said; "I might go back."

"Will you?" she faltered.

"To Galbraith, you say! You *want* me to go back?"

"Do you 'want' to leave him here friendless, sick. Oh, it was well I came! I must have had an inkling; yes, yes, a presentiment."

"*That 's* why you came! Why you waited here!"

The sailors might abandon their dangerous task and leave those two there on the beach, for all it seemed to matter to Louis Cheviot, since he had halted on the words: "Galbraith behind these days, too!"

The shouting of the sailors made him turn his eyes. The boat out there, baffled again, was driven back in a third effort to make the final run. Cheviot with his free hand shaped a trumpet, and through it shouted across the surf, "Try up here!"

The men in the boat called out something that was drowned in the clamor of the waves, and Cheviot was running Hildegarde faster than ever down that last stretch of the stony beach. Would he never stop and let her get back her voice? Oh, this carrying a hot ball of lead in your breast, and having to lift it every time you strained for breath.

"Louis, wait! Ky, Ky, come on!" Why was he hurrying her more than ever? Did he imagine— Her power to think seemed to be leaving her. A wavering vision off there in the sunshine of Louis's late guide hurrying down from the settlement with several other men, two were natives. And the boat, where was the boat? Beaten back again, and that time all but swamped. Yes,

now it was gone—down behind the white breakers, or further down among the rocks? The look on Louis's face—it gave her a new measure of loneliness. It was like the door of one's own home locked and barred against one. But she could n't see well, for the loosened hair, blown into her eyes, was blinding her. Tears, too. On and on over the water-worn stones with that harsh hand grasping her. If her feet slipped they were not suffered to falter, if they stumbled they were harshly steadied. On and on with this constriction at the breast, and at her side this face of granite. A moment's memory of the arctic current, and the picture that had stood to Galbraith for the type of helpless human striving. Something of the same sense of futility visited her as her feet followed the stronger will. Did nothing matter then, except this on and on? Death up yonder on the tundra. Death down there in the surf. Pain wherever there was life. Pain only to draw the breath. She got hers in great, clutching gasps that stabbed her. Now they were down near the foam-line. They were running in the wet sand. The rage of the surf in her ears, the taste of the brine on her lips. John Galbraith found, and John Galbraith dying. Everything changing, Louis most of all. The fabric of her world dissolving before her dazed eyes to the sound of sea-born thunder.

"You 've got to make a rush—and not mind a ducking!" It was one of the sailors shouting. The big fellow in the hip-boots had leaped out of the plunging boat into the surf. He was hurled headlong, recovered footing, and, streaming with sea water, buffeted his way out of the foam, while he roared angrily, "Come on, if yer comin'. Cap'n's orders, bring ye or leave ye."

"The dog first," Hildegarde cried out. "No, the lame one."

The sailor hesitated, swore, and then, on Cheviot's word, obeyed. His late guide panting, breathless, appeared with the other men at his heels, all but the Esquimaux with letters to send out. Cheviot thrust them in his pocket.

"Now, Hildegarde."

"Not both of us," she said, meeting his eye. "Which?" Each looked deep in that swift instant, neither flinching.

"If you are n't coming of your own accord—" he said.

"What then?"

He made a sign to the blaspheming sailor. The two lifted her in their arms and carried her through the surf, just as hours before they had carried her out.

"Now, sir," said the sailor, "in with you." Cheviot stood with the foam swirling above his long boot tops. "You want me to stay behind?" he called.

"If I could do it myself," Hildegarde began.

Without a word he turned his back on her, strode out of the water and up the stony beach.

If, upon his return home, Mr. Mar was surprised at the warmth of his reception, he was yet more perplexed to find himself never once called upon to state the value of his Polaris mining interests.

When he sufficiently recovered from his astonishment at this oversight on Mrs. Mar's part, he tried once or twice to introduce the subject of his claims into the family circle. But his wife firmly changed the conversation, as one who insists that painful bygones shall be bygones

forever. Mar smiled inwardly, for Cheviot's report had been glowing, and for Cheviot to write like that—well, it was, as the sage said, significant of much. But Cheviot was still "in Alaska, looking after things," and Mar kept his own counsel.

It was plain that these last years had left their mark upon his wife. He laid the change at first to the disintegrating action of time upon even that hard, bright surface. He never knew the secret rage he caused by attributing to the weakness of age what was due to a hard-won self-mastery, a realized and ripened affection. Only little by little did he become aware that the alteration, so far from being a sign of letting-go, was evidence of a fresh taking-hold; a courageous determination not to shrink from making unpleasant discoveries about herself merely because she was of an age when most people cease to make discoveries of any sort.

Whatever pains her late-won knowledge cost Mrs. Mar, her family, and especially her old and broken husband, reaped some benefit of that lady's ability to go on learning at a time of life when the majority think it rather noble if they make so much as an effort to teach.

It is probable that, failing Hildegarde, Mar might never have grasped the full meaning of the enlightenment that had come to his life's partner during these three years of his absence. Upon that first glimpse of him, as he came limping in at the door, his wife had looked at him with a face no one who saw could forget. "It 's been hard for you, too," she said.

"For me, too?" he echoed, wondering.

But she had no other word, either then or after—no gift of tender apology, nor even of explanation. Her

task, as she conceived it, was not to talk about a long past that was irrevocable, but to "show" the possibility of a brief future that she felt to be still within their reach.

For Hildegarde all life had come to a standstill.

Weeks must go by before Bella, at her old friend's urgent summons, could get back from abroad.

Hildegarde's soreness of heart, her hopelessness of the greater gladness for herself, left her the freer to think of it as only half an achievement—this bringing her father back in the flesh. She must see his spirit "at home" before her task was ended. No discreet opportunity was lost to set her mother in an explanatory light. When the neighbors chorused admiration of the girl's pluck and resourcefulness on the great journey, oh-ing and ah-ing, and "How on earth did you manage?"—"It was never the least difficult," Hildegarde would interrupt. "When I was at a loss I always thought how my mother would take hold of the matter, and when I had imagined her into my perplexity it was n't a perplexity any longer. I saw just what she would do, and I saw it was just right."

Only once, with her father alone, did she venture openly to suggest a corrected judgment of the past.

They had been talking of Mrs. Locke. Mar, who had failed so signally in getting a post for himself, had succeeded in getting one for his daughter's friend.

"You *have* been good about it!" Hildegarde said. "I 'm so grateful. So is she."

"So is the firm. She 's a success."

"It just shows!"

"Shows what?"

"That the reason women are n't more use in the world is because they don't have a chance."

"H'm!" said Mr. Mar.

"No. Not a real chance, father."

"Good heaven! They have everything."

"No. They don't have education. I don't mean out of books. It 's just as Mrs. Locke says. They stand as little chance of knowing about life as kings and queens do. They are still a class apart."

"Oh, she talks like that—your Mrs. Locke?" said Mar, with an obvious uneasiness.

"Not of herself. Of the rest of us—unless"—she smiled—"unless we 've been to Nome; or, like mother, to Mecca."

"To Mecca?"

With a face more serious the girl went on: "I 've only just begun to notice who among the women I know are the most successful and the most sensible. They 're the ones that have had the most experience, gone about most, or"—her voice sunk—"had some great trouble, *known* about life somehow by knocking up against it. It looks as if the only way to get judgment is by having to judge. Men, of course—you 're always practising. You 're *in* things. You are n't an outsider."

"Who is an outsider?"

"Every woman, when she comes out of her own front door. Now"—before he could answer she hurried on—"now, there 's mother" (she spoke as if she had only just remembered her). "A clever person like mother—why, if she 'd had ten times as much to do, she 'd have done it ten times better. And she would n't have had time to think about—a—the cracks in the china. Yes, father,

you may depend upon it, it 's the women that have n't got much in them that fit best into the small places. Mother 's always been crowded."

When Bella came back from England that September, Mar and his daughter had been already six weeks at home. Although given full credit for having so happily reconstituted the domestic circle, for Hildegarde herself the devouring loneliness that had invaded existence showed its first sign of yielding when Bella's childish face appeared at the door. None the less for Bella's friend a shrinking of the heart as she held close the slight figure in its smart French gown. What a butterfly to be broken on the wheel of life!

"But Louis!" Twenty minutes after her arrival, Bella, as she followed Hildegarde up-stairs, put the question for the second time. Why had he stayed behind?

Hildegarde's only answer was to hold open the door of her room and, when the new-comer had passed through, to shut it softly behind them both. Still in silence she laid down Bella's hat and gloves, and then came and stood beside her friend, who sat watching her from the old nook of the cushioned window-seat.

"You might have told me something, even in a cable. What happened up there?" Bella said softly.

"What happened?"

"Yes. About Louis."

"I came to realize him. There 's nothing like that wonderful north light for making you see truly."

"Well, what did you find he was like when you saw him—like that, in a north light?"

"I found that he was—the man I wanted to go through life with."

"I 've been hoping for that," said Bella quietly.

"Ah, but I did n't only find him up there. I lost him, too."

Bella leaned forward and took Hildegarde's hand. Very gently she drew her down on the cushioned seat.

Hildegarde had turned her filling eyes away, but she faced her friend for the moments of that low crying, "Oh, Bella, Bella, when you think what a miracle it is to find the right one in the maze, how is it that we ever let the right one go?"

Bella released the hand she had taken and turned her head, looking out of the window.

But Hildegarde's thrilling voice went on: "I wonder we don't watch at the gate of the Beloved from dawn till night, waiting till he comes. I wonder he does n't lie all night at her door, for fear in a dream she may steal away."

"And yet," said the other, "in broad daylight each lets the other go."

"Yes, and with an air of being willing. Of being able to bear their going. And we can't bear it!" Her dimmed eyes fell on Bella's beautiful face. "At least, I can't bear it—or—if I do, it will be because you help me, Butterfly Bella. For you 've learned how."

"Yes, I 've learned how."

Strange, wonderful little Bella. Hildegarde stared at the slight creature, half-stoic and half-sprite.

"How was it? Why could n't Louis see?"

"I tried his patience again and again."

"You did n't wait till you got him in a north light for that."

"—and he was strong and kind and immovable in his

goodness, no matter what I did or said. And his faithfulness to my father—there are n't any words for that. But you remember—Bella, sit close—mother told you about the hermit."

"The hermit?"

"The strange man they all thought had found the Mother Lode."

Step by step, moment by moment, she went through those hours at Polaris, though there was little need to take Bella farther than the threshold of the hut.

She held up two shaking hands, and, "I know! I know!" she whispered. "Before you open the door, before you knock—I know."

"How do you know?"

"Go on," said Bella, with an intensity of quietness. And like that to the end—looking more than ever a spirit, and like a spirit seeming to have no human heart for breaking, Bella listened with wide, far-looking eyes that half the time were tearless.

It was Hildegarde who broke down when she told how at the last, Ky and she had left him. When her choked voice failed: "Of course, I know the end," said Bella, and they held each other fast, sitting there a long time with no word spoken.

At last Hildegarde felt the small hands loose their hold. Bella stood up. And now she was walking up and down the room. At last, as by a chance, her eyes found Hildegarde, and a great gentleness came into the little face. She came back to the window and stood close against her friend.

Hildegarde lifted her head. "You say you know the end, but you don't quite. Louis came calling me to

hurry,'' and she told of those few minutes on the beach. ''I did n't realize I was ruining my life. I went on insisting. Yes, Jack Galbraith did n't die deserted, for I sent him in his last hour my best chance of happiness. I clung to the side of the boat and watched Louis cross the beach with Reddy at his heels. Ky was crouching at the stern with her black muzzle turned to the shore, howling, howling. The men were angry, the dog was in their way. ''She is hungry,'' I said. She had begun to gnaw the glove I had dropped in the bottom of the boat. Then it suddenly flashed over me! If there was nothing in the hut to feed a hungry dog, neither was there any food for a man.''

Bella hid her face.

With fresh tears Hildegarde went on, ''And Louis would n't know. It had n't occurred to me at all while I was there. I found myself sobbing, and saying half out loud, 'Oh, God, oh, God, is *that* why Jack is dying?' The sailors were staring. I leaned over and said to the big Dane, 'Do you want to make some money, you and these others? I 'll pay you, pay you well, if you 'll give me just five minutes more on shore.' No, no. They were all of one mind. 'I 'll pay you ten dollars a minute,' I said, and I 'd have gone on offering more if they had n't turned back for that. It 's risking life, they said, and they told me how the captain— But they thought I was distracted at leaving Louis, and that all I wanted was to get him. They liked Louis. They turned back. Just then the whistle screamed out from the *Beluga* very angrily. But they ran the boat in on a great wave, and I flung out through the surf and ran up on the tundra calling Louis. He was standing at the door of the hut

with the man who 'd shown him the way to the mines. Louis turned round when he heard my voice, and oh, Bella, the look on his face! 'So you could n't leave it to me *even to bury him,*' he said." She hid her eyes in Bella's lap. "And that was the end."

There was a long, long silence. At last a hand on Hildegarde's hair, and Bella's voice saying: "For *you* it was n't the end."

The other lifted her face. "Yes, for me, too. 'There 's nothing to be done,' Louis repeated that. I was to go back, he said, for my father's sake. And I did. I was quite dazed. But for me, too, it was the end."

"Where is Louis now?"

"I don't know. I have n't seen him since."

"Nor heard?"

"I got a letter to him, but—"

"Was n't there time for an answer?"

"I got an answer. But there was nothing in the letter."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing, but how they 'd buried John Galbraith. Oh, *Bella!*" Hildegarde's horror-struck eyes besought forgiveness.

But Bella spoke with a strange steadiness. "Louis did n't say any of the things you wanted him to say?"

Hildegarde shook her head. "We waited, father and I. We lived on board first one and then another steamer. And two ships went away without us. Father was so good, so good. He moved heaven and earth to get another message to Polaris to say that we were waiting. And Louis never came. I have hurt him so much he can't bear even to see me." They sat in the silence, crying.

"Bella."

"Yes."

"You and I will never let each other go."

"No," said Bella.

"You and I alone together till the end."

"And Ky."

"Ky, of course," Hildegarde amended. "Where is she now?"

"Down there, in the shade of the redwood. There, don't you see?"

Hildegarde shook her head. "Not very well." She wiped away her tears. "But that 's how I kept seeing life all the way home. You and the great discoverer and I."

Bella had stood up. "You 're as blind as Ky!"

"Why do you say that?" Hildegarde asked miserably, with a sudden sense of desertion. "What do *you* see, then?"

"Louis Cheviot coming across the lawn."